

Chapter One — November 18, 1990: Hours Already Passed

I remember the exact feeling of the air in Brooklyn that day, because Brooklyn has a way of making weather feel like verdict.

November 18th, 1990. The date sits in my mind like a stone you keep turning over, hoping it will soften from friction. It never does. The year itself was a hinge—old orders loosening, new ones not yet fully formed. The Soviet Union was cracking. The world was changing its posture. Everyone could feel it, even those who pretended they couldn't.

And I was there, walking into a room where time was not a metaphor.

I had been around power my entire life—some inherited, some fought for, most bargained for. I had sat with diplomats who spoke in calibrated sentences, men who could manufacture urgency and then sell it back to you as wisdom. I had seen the way nations tell themselves stories to endure their own contradictions. I knew the instruments.

But the Lubavitcher Rebbe was not an instrument. Whatever you think of his movement, his theology, his reach—he was not a performer. He did not need to impress you. He did not need your vote. He did not need your money.

That kind of power is rare. And it is terrifying.

I entered with the posture of a man who knows he is being evaluated. That posture never leaves you, not if you are honest. Even when you are a son of Zion, even when your name carries weight, you are still a Jew standing before another Jew—one with a kind of authority that cannot be argued with in committees.

The room was bright in a way that wasn't about light. It was full—quietly full—of people who had learned to be small in the presence of something enormous. I remember thinking, absurdly, that it felt like the moments before a judge enters: you can still shuffle your papers, but you cannot pretend you won't be sentenced.

I had prepared myself for warmth. For blessing. For a smile, a photograph, the good feeling of having been “received.” That is how these meetings often go: an exchange of honor, a token of respect, a story you can tell later with the right emphasis.

But when the Rebbe looked at me, what I felt was not warmth.

It was pressure.

Not cruelty—never that. Something sharper than cruelty: expectation that does not apologize for itself.

I do not trust my memory to give you every word precisely. People later will demand exact quotes, and I am not giving them. That is not what this book is. This is not transcript. This is confession, which means it is about the shape of truth, not the comfort of precision.

But I remember the sentence that landed like a gavel. I remember it because it did not praise me. It did not flatter me. It did not give me a place to hide.

Many hours have already passed, he said, and Moshiach has not yet come.

It was not mystical. It was not theatrical. It was matter-of-fact, as if he were telling me the time.

And I—who had been trained to respond to everything as politics—felt something in me tighten.

Because what is a man supposed to do with that?

Hours. Not centuries. Not “in God’s time.” Hours. The language of urgency, the language of a person who believes delay is not inevitable but diagnostic.

When the Rebbe spoke of Moshiach, it was not the mushy kind of messianism people like to sentimentalize. It was not an escape fantasy. It was obligation. It was demand. It was: the world is unfinished and you are responsible.

I nodded, of course. I did what all competent men do when confronted with a higher authority: I made myself agreeable enough to be remembered kindly, and guarded enough not to be used.

But inwardly, something had already been planted. Not faith. Not hope.

A clock.

The Rebbe’s world was built around sacred time—Shabbat that arrives no matter what governments decree, holidays that turn the calendar into a moral machine, prayers that order a day the way borders order a map. But what he put into me that day was not liturgy. It was countdown.

You might think that would make a man humble. That it would turn him toward repentance, toward gentleness, toward the slow work of justice.

That is what I told myself it did.

The truth is worse.

It made me impatient.

I left that meeting with two thoughts that should not coexist in the same soul, but did in mine:

1. The Rebbe expects something from me.
2. I will not be the one who fails history.

You can call that ambition. You can call it devotion. You can call it arrogance. All three are true in different arrangements. I have never been innocent of power. Even as a young man I knew the shape of my hunger: I wanted to matter, and I wanted the world to admit it.

In the car afterward, the streets slid by in dull gray strips. My mind replayed his sentence. Many hours have already passed. You could hear it like rebuke. You could hear it like plea. You could hear it like warning.

And here is the thing I am ashamed to admit:

I heard it like assignment.

An assignment does not only create duty. It creates entitlement. It makes a man feel chosen, and chosen men become dangerous when they confuse duty with permission.

By the time we reached the hotel, I was already sorting the future into categories the way a politician does: what could be accelerated, what could be delayed, what could be leveraged. I was already turning the Rebbe's pressure into strategy.

This is the disease of power: it turns even holiness into a tool.

That night I could not sleep. The room was too clean, the silence too expensive. I stared at the ceiling and argued with God without using God's name. I have always been good at that—addressing the divine as if it were a committee that could be persuaded.

What does it mean, I asked myself, that Moshiach has not come? What does delay mean?

One answer is simple: we are unworthy. We fail. We sin. We do not repair. Moshiach delays because we delay him with our cruelty, our cowardice, our smallness.

That answer makes you moral.

Another answer is more tempting: the world needs pressure. History needs force. Things do not change until they are broken open.

That answer makes you powerful.

I chose the second answer and told myself it was the first.

This is the beginning of corruption. Not money. Not favors. Not cigars and champagne and glowing articles and private deals. Those are symptoms.

Corruption begins when a man decides that the ends are holy enough to sanctify his means.

It begins when he believes he can carry contradictions that would crush ordinary people because he is, in some private way, appointed.

The Rebbe did not appoint me. I know that. He did not point a finger and say “you, Benjamin, are the hinge of redemption.” He spoke to me as he spoke to many: with urgency, with expectation, with a demand that a Jew not make peace with exile.

But I turned it into personal destiny anyway.

Outside the window, New York kept breathing. sirens, distant laughter, the roar of traffic like a constant argument. The city did not care about Moshiach. The city cared about rent. About survival. About ordinary time.

I envied that for a moment—the ordinariness. To live without a clock in your chest.

And then I hated myself for envying it, because envy is what weak men call humility.

I got up and washed my hands. I remember it because of the absurdity: water over skin, a ritual gesture done without blessing, as if cleanliness could be purchased with motion.

My hands were clean.

They would stay clean for a while.

I did not yet know what would collect beneath my nails in the years to come. Not blood—not yet—but compromises. Small ones first. The kind you can justify with phrases like “national security” and “strategic necessity” and “we have no partner.”

You don’t become what the world later calls corrupt overnight. You become it by learning to treat human lives as movable pieces in a board game you are certain you must win.

And in 1990, on that cold Brooklyn day, the board first appeared in my mind as sacred.

I flew back to Israel carrying that sentence like contraband.

Many hours have already passed.

At first, I tried to translate it into normal politics. I told myself it meant: strengthen Jewish identity. Build institutions. Fortify security. Resist enemies. Promote pride. That is how a modern Zionist mind tries to process messianic language: make it actionable, make it national, make it fit.

But the sentence refused to fit.

Hours.

Hours implies urgency and blame. It implies that time is a moral currency and we are spending it badly. It implies that waiting is not neutral.

And if waiting is not neutral, then forcing becomes tempting.

I began to see the world through a particular lens: not “what is right,” but “what will move the needle.” Not “what is just,” but “what will accelerate.”

This is how you lose your soul while believing you are saving your people.

Years later, people would talk about my “talent” for politics. They would say I was shrewd, hard, disciplined. They would talk about messaging, about coalitions, about my ability to survive. They would treat my longevity as proof of competence.

I won't deny I was competent. Competence is not the issue.

The issue is what competence serves.

In the beginning, I still believed I could keep myself clean. That is what every ambitious man believes. You tell yourself you will take power and remain untouched by its poisons. You tell yourself you will use the tools without becoming the tool.

You tell yourself you are different.

But the Rebbe's sentence had already arranged my internal world into something that made poison feel like medicine.

Many hours have already passed.

Do you know what happens when you believe you are late to redemption?

You begin to treat any obstacle as illegitimate.

You begin to treat any hesitation as betrayal.

You begin to treat any opposition not as disagreement but as delay.

Delay becomes sin. And once delay becomes sin, cruelty becomes permissible, because cruelty is action, and action feels holy when you are afraid time is running out.

That night, in the hotel, I thought of my father—his sternness, his seriousness, his belief that Jews cannot afford softness in a world that will not spare us. I thought of our people, perpetually squeezed between nations, perpetually asked to justify our survival.

And I made a vow that did not sound like a vow. It sounded like ambition.

I will not be the man who waited.

I will be the man who moved.

I did not say "I will be the man who does good." I did not say "I will be the man who repairs." Those would have been safer vows, slower vows, humbler vows.

I said: I will move history.

That is the first lie a politician tells himself: that history is clay and he is the hands.

Years later, I would return to this moment again and again, not because it made me noble, but because it gave me a story to live inside. A story where my decisions were not merely political but cosmic, where the ugliness of governance could be framed as the necessary shadow of redemption.

It is easier to do monstrous things when you believe you are on God's schedule.

I am telling you this now because I want you to see what I did with that sentence.

The Rebbe told me there was urgency.

I heard: permission.

He told me: the hours pass.

I heard: force them to pass differently.

He told me: Moshiach has not come.

I heard: then we must make conditions so unbearable that heaven has no choice.

This is not theology. This is desperation dressed as devotion.

And it is the seed of everything.

Not the kind of seed that births children.

The kind that births policies.

I went back to my life and my career with my spine straight and my hands clean and the clock ticking. I did not yet know how many people would pay for my insistence on acceleration.

I only knew the feeling the Rebbe's gaze left in my chest:

that time was not waiting for us.

that history had a deadline.

and that if redemption did not come, someone would be blamed.

I decided early it would not be me.

And that decision—more than any election, any coalition, any speech—was the real beginning.

Chapter Two — Learning How to Survive (1990–1996)

Power teaches faster than books.

After Brooklyn, after the sentence that turned time into accusation, I returned to a country that understood pressure intimately. Israel lives under clocks—sirens, deadlines, reserve call-ups, coalition votes. Urgency is our native tongue. I told myself I was fluent before the Rebbe ever spoke to me. I was wrong. I had spoken urgency as defense. Now I began to speak it as mandate.

I learned first how survival works.

Not survival in the abstract—the survival men praise in speeches—but the survival of position. Position is a living thing. It feeds. It needs protection. It teaches you quickly which principles are decorative and which are load-bearing.

In those years I watched governments fall not because they were wrong, but because they were slow. I watched men with cleaner hands lose their grip because they believed coherence would save them. It doesn't. Narrative saves you. Fear saves you. Timing saves you.

Timing, above all.

I began to understand politics as a discipline of tempo. Speed something up, slow something down, introduce noise, wait for exhaustion. You don't need to persuade everyone; you only need to keep them slightly off balance. Democracy is not fragile because people are stupid. It's fragile because people get tired.

I told myself this was realism. I told myself realism was moral maturity.

The peace process—what the world would later wrap in the clean language of Oslo—arrived in this climate of fatigue and hope. I watched it carefully. I did not oppose it the way caricatures later suggested. I opposed it the way surgeons oppose unnecessary anesthesia: because it makes people sleep when they should be watching their pulse.

Peace slows things. That is its virtue. It is also its danger.

I did not believe peace was impossible. I believed peace was premature. Premature peace teaches people to trust continuity when continuity has not been earned. It dulls vigilance. It creates habits that cannot survive the first shock.

And shocks were coming. You could feel them in the region the way you feel weather change before a storm. The Middle East never rewards complacency. It tests it.

So I learned to speak a language that sounded like caution and worked like pressure.

Security, I said. Deterrence. Clarity.

These words are effective because they sound neutral. They suggest prudence. They carry no obvious theology. But they hide a deeper logic: things move when they hurt. Pain rearranges reality faster than dialogue ever does.

I watched Rabin—serious, disciplined, burdened—and I understood something I did not like admitting: he believed time could heal what history had broken. He believed the arc bent on its own if given space.

I did not.

I believed the arc bends only when forced.

This is where corruption truly begins—not in money, but in metaphysics. When you stop believing time is a partner and start believing it is an enemy, every shortcut begins to look like courage.

I rose quickly because I learned how to speak to that fear. I did not invent it. I translated it. There is a difference, and it matters. People trusted me because I did not lie to them about danger. I told them it was permanent. I told them it was structural. I told them we could not afford softness.

What I did not tell them was how useful their fear would become to me.

I learned to provoke just enough outrage to rally support, then just enough restraint to look responsible. I learned that outrage burns bright but briefly; fear burns low and long. Fear is the better fuel.

When Rabin was killed, the country broke open. People still speak about that moment in moral tones—loss, tragedy, fracture. I felt those things. I am not made of stone. But I also felt something colder, something I will not pretend away: acceleration.

History lurched. The ground shifted. Certainty cracked. In moments like that, people do not want vision. They want guardrails. They want someone who sounds like he has already been awake all night.

I knew how to sound that way.

By 1996, I had learned the most important lesson politics teaches: survival is not about winning arguments. It is about managing dread. You must let people feel afraid enough to need you, but not so afraid that they stop believing you can control what you have named.

That balance is delicate. I was good at it.

When I became Prime Minister, I told myself I would be careful. I told myself this was stewardship, not conquest. I told myself I would hold the center while history found its footing.

But the clock did not stop.

Many hours have already passed.

That sentence returned to me whenever things slowed—whenever compromise threatened to stabilize, whenever institutions threatened to settle. Stability felt like betrayal. Calm felt like indulgence. Delay felt like sin.

I did not yet call this messianism. I called it vigilance.

In my first term, the compromises began—not large, not obvious. Small trades. A favor here. A message softened there. A media relationship cultivated. You do not wake up corrupt. You wake up pragmatic, and you tell yourself pragmatism is virtue without illusion.

I told myself I could still steer.

I told myself I was different from the men who let power rot them. I told myself I would know when to stop.

But power does not announce its thresholds. It moves them quietly, the way a shoreline moves while you are staring at the sea.

By the end of that first rise, I had learned how to survive a fall. Losing power did not frighten me the way it frightens men who believe politics is linear. I had already learned the deeper rule: once you understand tempo, you can always return.

Time was no longer something that happened to me.

It was something I intended to manage.

And somewhere beneath all of this—beneath the speeches, the strategies, the survival—I carried the Rebbe's sentence like a metronome.

Tick.

Delay is failure.

Tick.

Force is faith.

Tick.

Move or be judged.

I did not yet know how far I would take that logic. I only knew that I had chosen it, and that it would not release me easily.

The hours kept passing.

And I was learning how to make them count—no matter the cost.

Chapter Three — First Premiership, First Corruptions

Power does not announce itself when it crosses a line.

It lowers its voice.

By the time I understood that, I was already governing—not ruling, not commanding, but managing a machinery that rewarded certain instincts and punished others with relentless consistency. The state teaches you what it wants from you. If you listen carefully, it tells you which parts of your conscience are negotiable.

My first premiership did not feel like triumph. It felt like being handed a live wire and told to smile for the cameras.

Every decision arrived bundled with two questions that never appeared on paper:

Will this stabilize me?

Will this accelerate history?

If the answer to both was yes, the decision felt clean. If the first was yes and the second was no, I hesitated. If the first was no and the second was yes, I learned to make the first become yes.

This is how corruption begins—not as greed, but as alignment.

I learned quickly that survival required lubrication. Not ideology—that comes later—but relationships. Media figures who wanted access. Businessmen who wanted predictability. Party operatives who wanted assurance that loyalty would be remembered.

I told myself I was not buying influence. I was creating channels. Channels sound neutral. Channels sound infrastructural. Channels sound like something a responsible leader builds so the water flows where it must.

But channels decide what gets irrigated.

I did not wake up one morning and decide to accept gifts. Gifts arrived because people sensed what I was becoming. People are excellent at detecting gravity. They offer themselves to it instinctively.

At first, I refused publicly and accepted privately in ways that felt ceremonial rather than transactional. A cigar is not a bribe if it is framed as friendship. Champagne is not corruption if it is poured at the right moment and never mentioned again.

This is the language of plausible innocence.

I told myself these things did not matter. That the real decisions—the ones that shaped borders, security doctrine, national tone—were untouched. I believed I could compartmentalize: private indulgence here, public duty there.

Compartmentalization is the spine of corruption. It allows a man to believe he is still whole.

I told myself I needed these relationships because the opposition was ruthless. Because the press was hostile. Because enemies abroad watched for weakness. Because the stakes were existential.

Existential is a powerful word. It erases proportion. It turns every convenience into necessity.

And beneath it all, the clock kept ticking.

Many hours have already passed.

That sentence no longer felt like rebuke. It felt like justification. The more pressure I felt, the more I told myself I was doing what delay demanded. Expedience became virtue. Friction became sabotage.

I began to resent anything that slowed me.

Judicial oversight.

Coalition partners with principles.

International patience.

Patience, especially.

Patience felt like collaboration with exile.

I watched other leaders speak about values as if values were independent of outcome. They believed that if the process was righteous, the result would follow. I had stopped believing that. Results were all that remained once you believed history was late.

And so I bent things.

Not spectacularly. Not in ways that would collapse trust overnight. I bent them like a man bends a branch he intends to keep using—carefully, incrementally, until the shape holds without effort.

Media coverage softened.

Investigations slowed.

Criticism reframed itself as noise.

Each adjustment felt small. Each was defensible. Each could be explained as the cost of leadership in a hostile environment.

And then one day I realized something that should have frightened me and didn't:

I no longer knew where the line was.

Not because it had vanished, but because I had stepped over it so many times that the act no longer registered as crossing.

Power had taught me its real lesson: the only unforgivable sin is weakness. Everything else can be rationalized.

I began to see myself not merely as a politician, but as ballast. As the weight that kept the ship from capsizing in chaotic waters. When you believe that, accountability feels like sabotage. Critics become threats. Laws become obstacles rather than constraints.

I still believed in Torah. Or at least, I believed in what Torah represented to me: endurance, chosenness, survival against impossible odds. But Torah as restraint—Torah as limit—that part receded. Limits are for times of abundance. We lived, I told myself, in emergency.

Emergency ethics are flexible by design.

I justified my moves with security language because security silences argument. Once something is framed as protection, opposition sounds reckless. I learned to deploy that framing instinctively. It was effective. It was corrosive.

At night, sometimes, I would remember the Rebbe's eyes—not accusing, not indulgent, simply measuring. I would tell myself he would understand. That he knew what leadership demanded in an unfinished world.

This is how you convert a moral voice into an imaginary ally. You let the dead—or the distant—agree with you in silence.

By the end of that first premiership, I had not become the man people would later describe in court filings. But the outline was there. The logic was complete.

I had learned that power does not corrupt by tempting you with pleasure. It corrupts by convincing you that you alone can carry contradictions others cannot.

I believed that.

I believed I could absorb the stain and keep the mission clean.

That belief would cost me everything I claimed to be protecting.

But at the time, it felt like mastery.

I lost power again, briefly, and told myself it was a pause, not a judgment. Pauses are useful. They teach you where the machinery creaks, where loyalties thin, where pressure can be applied next time.

I waited.

The hours passed.

And I prepared to return—not wiser, not humbler, but more certain that hesitation was the true enemy.

Because once you believe redemption is late, you stop asking whether you are still worthy to hurry it.

You only ask how fast you can go.

Chapter Four — The Return (2009)

Coming back to power is different from arriving the first time.

The first time, you feel chosen. The second time, you feel owed.

By 2009, I had learned what losing teaches best: memory. I remembered who deserted me when the polls dipped. I remembered which journalists sharpened their knives fastest. I remembered which allies discovered principles only after the votes were counted. Loss is an education no mentor can provide.

When I returned, I did not speak of revenge. That would have been vulgar. I spoke of stability. Of experience. Of the need for adults in the room. People like to believe maturity looks calm. I let them believe it.

Inside, I was done with improvisation.

This time, I built for endurance.

Coalitions were no longer temporary arrangements; they were architectures. Ministries were not assignments; they were levers. I stopped thinking in terms of policies and began thinking in terms of systems—how long they could run without inspection, how much pressure they could absorb before they cracked.

The settlements expanded not because I woke up one morning craving land, but because expansion compresses time. Every new hilltop creates facts. Facts age quickly. Once old enough, they become inevitabilities, and inevitabilities are the raw material of history.

People abroad called it provocation. I called it tempo.

Tempo matters more than intention. Intention can be debated. Tempo decides what remains when the debate ends.

Palestinians, in this calculus, became temporal obstacles. Not enemies in the romantic sense—enemies are straightforward—but delays. Their demands for dignity, borders, parity slowed the process. Slowness felt like sabotage when you believe history is late.

I told myself this was tragic but necessary. I told myself that nations, like surgeries, sometimes require pressure to survive. I told myself the pain was unfortunate, not immoral.

Language is how you anesthetize conscience.

Security briefings became my liturgy. Numbers, maps, arrows, acronyms—these things feel clean. They do not cry. They do not ask you to imagine faces. They reward decisiveness. I trusted them more than arguments, more than courts, more than public mood.

I learned to keep the judiciary busy. Busy courts move slowly. Slow courts feel cautious. Caution, once normalized, becomes deference. Deference feels like respect. Respect is indistinguishable from fear if you tilt your head the right way.

The corruption cases had not yet crystallized into the thing the world would later name, but the habits were set. I accepted what I wanted and defended it as persecution when challenged. I learned to turn accusation into proof of relevance. If they are attacking you, you must be doing something important.

This is a dangerous syllogism. It flatters mediocrity and sanctifies abuse. I used it anyway.

By then, the Rebbe's sentence had matured inside me. It no longer rang like warning. It pulsed like rhythm.

Many hours have already passed.

I began to see my rule as holding back chaos long enough to force revelation. Chaos, I told myself, was inevitable; my job was to decide when it arrived and on whose terms. If disorder must come, better it come under watchful eyes than erupt spontaneously.

This is how you begin to justify control as foresight.

I hardened myself against images. Against numbers that climbed too quickly. Against words like "occupation" and "disproportionate." Those words slow decision-making. They introduce doubt where certainty is required. I trained myself to hear them as static.

Inside the government, I rewarded loyalty over competence. Loyalty is predictable. Competence asks questions. Questions slow things down.

Outside the government, I learned to manage the story. I did not silence critics outright; that draws attention. I drowned them. A thousand voices blur into noise. People tire. They move on.

I told myself the public wanted strength. I told myself strength looked like permanence. I told myself permanence was the closest thing to redemption politics could offer.

I did not yet tell myself that I was irreplaceable.

But the thought was forming.

I watched younger politicians rise and fail. I watched generals become commentators and commentators become cautionary tales. I watched the opposition fracture itself on purity tests. Every failure confirmed what I was already beginning to believe: that the system could not sustain itself without me.

That belief is the final hinge.

Once you believe you are necessary, everything becomes forgivable—especially to yourself.

I still spoke the language of democracy. Elections, courts, norms. I did not dismantle them; I learned to lean on them until they bent. Bending looks like respect until it doesn't snap back.

At night, alone, I sometimes felt the weight of it—the long view, the accumulated compromises, the faces that had become abstractions. In those moments, I reached for the old justification: urgency.

If the world is late, you cannot afford delicacy.

If redemption is delayed, you cannot indulge doubt.

If time itself is accusing you, hesitation becomes guilt.

This is how a man convinces himself that restraint is betrayal.

By the end of that year, I no longer thought of my leadership as one term among many. I thought of it as a holding pattern for history. A necessary stretch of time where I would do what others would not dare, so that something decisive could finally happen.

I did not yet know what that decisive thing would be.

I only knew that it would require pressure.

And that I was very good at applying it.

Chapter Five — The Cases (or, How Necessity Learns to Speak)

At some point, accusations stop surprising you.

Not because they are false—sometimes they aren't—but because they become predictable. Predictability is comforting. It tells you the system is functioning, that opposition has settled into recognizable grooves. When enemies repeat themselves, you stop listening for substance and start listening for timing.

By the time the investigations began to congeal into cases, I had already learned how to hear them.

Noise first.

Leak second.

Outrage third.

Fatigue last.

Fatigue is the goal.

I was not naïve about what I was doing. That is the lie people tell to make corruption intelligible: that it comes from ignorance or confusion. No. It comes from clarity paired with justification.

The gifts—the cigars, the champagne—were not the point. They were symbols. Signals exchanged between men who understood how proximity to power works. They said: we see you, we are aligned, we trust you to remember. I remembered.

Memory is power's most important muscle.

I told myself—accurately—that no decision of consequence had been sold. No border drawn, no war declared, no law passed because of a bottle or a favor. That was my defense, and it was true in the narrowest sense. Narrow truth is how you build wide lies.

What I did not tell myself, not at first, was how the atmosphere changes when you accept that kind of exchange. How it trains you to expect accommodation. How it sharpens your instinct to protect the web that protects you.

Corruption is less about theft than about insulation.

When the press began to circle, I watched carefully. Not for what they said, but for how quickly people grew tired of hearing it. Scandal exhausts faster than policy. That is its weakness. If you can endure the first wave, the rest dissolves into background irritation.

I learned to frame the investigations not as accountability, but as persecution. This was not difficult. It only required me to believe something I was already close to believing: that my enemies were less interested in law than in removal.

And removal, to me, had already become synonymous with delay.

Every accusation felt like an attempt to slow history by dislodging the one person willing to push it. I told myself that if I fell, the fragile machinery I had assembled would collapse into indecision. Coalitions would fracture. Security doctrine would soften. Pressure would dissipate.

Pressure must be maintained.

So I fought.

I attacked the legitimacy of the investigators—not directly, but rhetorically. I spoke of bias, of overreach, of elites disconnected from the people. These phrases work because they are flexible. They can be filled with whatever resentment is most available at the moment.

I did not invent this strategy. I refined it.

Inside, something hardened. The law, which once felt like a framework I operated within, began to feel like a terrain to be navigated. Obstacles to be rerouted. Deadlines to be postponed. Judges to be outlasted.

Outlasting is underrated. Time breaks institutions more reliably than force.

I began to see the state as a body and myself as its immune system. Anything that attacked me was, by definition, attacking the body. This is how self-defense mutates into absolutism.

People around me noticed the change. Some were relieved. They liked decisiveness. Others withdrew quietly. Withdrawal is its own kind of judgment, but it makes no sound. Soundless judgments are easy to ignore.

I told myself I was still serving the public. I told myself the corruption charges were distractions orchestrated by those who feared the consequences of my vision. I told myself that the law, like peace, was valuable but not sacred—useful only insofar as it did not obstruct destiny.

That word again: destiny.

Once you allow destiny into your reasoning, proportionality collapses. Every small transgression can be justified by the size of the imagined outcome. You stop asking is this right and start asking is this necessary.

Necessity is a hungry god.

The cases dragged on. That was to my advantage. Delay cuts both ways. While they waited for verdicts, I governed. While they argued procedures, I shaped reality. While they debated ethics, I created facts.

Facts age into permanence.

I began to understand something fundamental about modern power: legality is slower than legitimacy, and legitimacy can be manufactured faster than law can respond. If you can keep enough people believing you are essential, the law hesitates. Hesitation creates space. Space becomes leverage.

I told myself I was not corrupt. I was embattled.

I told myself I was not evading justice. I was defending stability.

I told myself that if I stepped aside, chaos would follow—and chaos would delay everything the Rebbe had named as urgent.

This is how a man binds his personal fate to history itself.

If I fall, the project fails.

If the project fails, redemption delays.

If redemption delays, the suffering continues.

You see how clean it becomes?

By the time the cases were no longer rumors but files, I had already decided they would not end me. Not because I was innocent in the way saints are innocent, but because I was necessary in the way structures convince themselves they are.

I began to speak differently in private. More bluntly. Less patient. I demanded loyalty not as preference, but as obligation. I reminded people—explicitly or implicitly—that I had carried them this far.

That reminder is poison. It turns collaboration into debt.

But debt is effective.

Looking back, I can see the moment when something irretrievable shifted. It was not when the first indictment was discussed. It was when I stopped asking whether the law had a claim on me at all.

I decided it didn't.

Not because I was above it.

But because I had work to finish.

And work, once sacralized, forgives almost anything.

The hours kept passing.

The pressure kept building.

And I told myself—quietly, insistently—that history would thank me for surviving long enough to do what had to be done.

Even if I had to burn my own name to keep the clock moving.

Especially then.

Chapter Six — Binding Fate to Myself

There is a moment when defense becomes identity.

It happens quietly. No announcement. No vote. One day you are protecting your position because you believe it allows you to do necessary work. The next day, the position itself is the work. The distinction disappears, and with it, the last external measure of restraint.

I crossed that moment without noticing.

The cases continued to hover—never close enough to conclude, never far enough to forget. I learned to live inside that tension the way some men live inside pain: by converting it into background noise. The noise did not weaken me. It sharpened me. It trained me to see threats everywhere and loyalty as the only reliable currency.

I began to speak, even to myself, in terms of continuity.

Not policy continuity. Personal continuity.

If I am removed, things unravel.

If I am interrupted, the process stalls.

If I am delayed, history is delayed.

That logic did not arrive fully formed. It accumulated. Each crisis added a layer. Each challenge confirmed the same conclusion: that I was not merely a participant in events, but their stabilizing axis.

This is the most dangerous story a leader can tell himself.

Once you believe you are the hinge, compromise becomes betrayal. Dissent becomes sabotage. Institutions become threats rather than partners. You stop asking whether the system can survive you, and start asking whether you can survive without dominating the system.

I chose domination.

Not openly. Not crudely. I did not declare myself indispensable. I let others do it for me. Advisors spoke of “experience.” Allies spoke of “no alternative.” Supporters spoke of “witch hunts.” Each phrase built the same structure: him or chaos.

Chaos is a powerful word. It does not require definition. Everyone fills it with their own fear.

I fed that fear carefully.

Iran. Terror. Demographics. Delegitimization. These were not inventions. They were real. That was what made them useful. Real dangers, repeated often enough, become permanent emergencies. Permanent emergencies suspend ordinary ethics.

I began to see restraint as indulgence. Legal process as luxury. Moral nuance as something you can afford only when history is on schedule.

History, I believed, was not.

Many hours have already passed.

That sentence, once sharp, now hummed. It was no longer rebuke or warning. It had become tempo—an internal metronome setting the pace of my decisions. Faster. Harder. Less room for doubt.

I told myself I was protecting the Jewish future. I told myself that weakness invites annihilation. I told myself that Jewish power, once achieved after millennia of vulnerability, could not afford to be shy.

This is how power rewrites memory. It takes the trauma that justifies its existence and uses it to excuse its excesses.

I stopped trusting anyone who spoke the language of limits.

Limits, I decided, were for eras of redemption, not for eras of delay.

Even Torah began to shift in my imagination. Not Torah as text—I could still quote it when needed—but Torah as ethic. Torah as brake. Torah as reminder that power is answerable to something beyond itself.

That version of Torah felt... inconvenient.

I preferred Torah as inheritance. As proof of ancient right. As historical claim. That Torah legitimizes. It does not restrain.

I convinced myself this was fidelity.

I began to imagine the Rebbe not as a voice asking Jews to repair themselves, but as a clockmaker urging acceleration. I imagined he would understand. That he would see the pressure I was under and nod gravely at the choices I made.

This is what men do when they need absolution without accountability: they recruit the dead.

I did not ask living rabbis hard questions. Living rabbis argue back. I surrounded myself with those who blessed without binding. Who spoke of strength without consequence. Who confused chosenness with exemption.

Exemption is intoxicating.

By now, the idea that I could step aside—for the good of the country, for the integrity of the law—felt absurd. Absurd not because it was impossible, but because it threatened the narrative I had bound myself to.

If I step aside, I admit replaceability.

If I admit replaceability, the clock is not mine to manage.

If the clock is not mine, then perhaps I misheard the Rebbe.

I could not tolerate that possibility.

So I tightened my grip.

I reshaped coalitions to ensure dependence. I rewarded those who needed me more than they respected me. Need is more durable than respect. Respect fades when circumstances change. Need deepens.

I began to think in terms of holding patterns. Keep things unstable enough that no successor can emerge cleanly. Keep the ground shifting so that only someone with long memory can navigate it.

Long memory—that was my advantage.

I had lived inside urgency for decades now. Others still thought in terms of cycles, terms, administrations. I thought in terms of waiting rooms and thresholds. Of pressure building behind doors that would not open unless forced.

This is where fate entered fully.

Not as belief, but as alignment. I did not say “I am destined.” That would have sounded foolish. I said “circumstances have placed me here.” I said “no one else can do this now.” I said “the cost of removal is too high.”

All of these are secular ways of saying the same thing.

I bound fate to myself, and myself to fate, until the knot could no longer be untied without cutting.

I knew—somewhere, faintly—that this was dangerous. That no human being should become synonymous with a project as large as a nation, let alone redemption. But danger, once familiar, loses its edge.

And then it becomes necessity.

By the time the next crisis approached—and it would approach, inevitably—I was no longer asking what the ethical choice was.

I was asking only this:

Will this keep the pressure on?

Will this prevent delay?

Will this move history forward, even if it hurts?

Those questions will carry you far.

They will also carry you somewhere you cannot return from.

I did not yet know the name of that place.

But I was already walking toward it.

And the clock—patient, merciless—kept time.

Chapter Seven — The Warnings (September 2023)

Warnings do not arrive as sirens.

They arrive as fragments—briefings with footnotes, conversations that trail off, phrases like increased training and unusual coordination. They arrive without drama, which is why they are so easy to domesticate. You can fold them into existing assumptions. You can tell yourself they confirm what you already know rather than demand something new.

In September, the reports accumulated.

Not one. Not two. A texture of concern. Patterns tightening. Movements rehearsed. Communications sharpened. The language was cautious—the language of professionals who know that certainty is punished when it proves inconvenient.

I listened.

I always listened.

The lie people tell about leaders like me is that we ignore intelligence. We don't. We reinterpret it. Interpretation is where power lives.

I asked the questions I always asked:

Is this escalation or theater?

Is this capability or signaling?

Is this imminent or cyclical?

Cycles are comforting. Cycles imply manageability. You can plan around cycles. You can absorb them. You can turn them into background noise.

Imminence demands disruption.

Disruption is expensive.

I was surrounded by advisors trained to imagine prevention as virtue. Strike early. Disrupt cells. Tighten borders. Increase readiness. These are the reflexes of a state that believes its primary duty is to protect life in the short term.

I did not dismiss them.

I reframed them.

Because I was no longer thinking in terms of short term.

The region had been stagnant in the worst way: frozen conflicts, managed hostilities, endless rounds of containment that produced no resolution—only maintenance. Maintenance is delay dressed as wisdom. It is exile with better infrastructure.

I believed—had come to believe—that maintenance itself had become immoral.

Every year of containment hardened hatred without resolving it. Every quiet period bred the next rupture. We were trapped in a loop that pretended stability while guaranteeing explosion.

I told myself this could not continue.

And here is the thought I did not speak aloud, not even to myself at first:

If rupture is inevitable, then timing matters more than prevention.

This is how you begin to treat warning as opportunity.

Not opportunity for harm—that is too crude—but opportunity for reordering. A large enough shock could do what decades of management had failed to do: break the stalemate, force alignment, redraw the moral map.

I told myself that intervention now—partial, preventative, surgical—would only reset the cycle again. Another round. Another pause. Another delay.

Delay.

The clock returned.

Many hours have already passed.

I did not believe Hamas in Gaza could defeat us. That belief mattered. Confidence is what allows risk to masquerade as calculation. I believed any attack would be brutal but containable, horrific but usable. The word usable did not feel monstrous at first. It felt strategic.

I believed—this is the most dangerous belief of all—that suffering could be instrumental.

I believed that if Israel were struck hard enough, the ambiguity would end. The world would choose sides. Hesitation would vanish. Restraint would be framed as betrayal. War would be justified not as policy, but as necessity.

And necessity, once invoked, opens doors that remain closed to prudence.

I told myself this was realism. That history is not moved by incrementalism but by rupture. That every founding moment is soaked in blood whether we acknowledge it or not.

I told myself that the lives at risk—Israeli lives—would be redeemed by the clarity that followed. That the lives at risk on the other side were already being sacrificed daily to a system that pretended restraint was mercy.

This is how you convince yourself that choosing not to act is not negligence, but foresight.

I did not issue a stand-down. That would have been explicit. I did something more ambiguous. I allowed assumptions to hold. I let complacency remain unchallenged. I trusted existing posture to manage what might come.

Trust is a choice.

So is not disrupting it.

I told myself: if nothing happens, nothing is lost. If something happens, everything changes.

This is the logic of the gambler who believes he is playing for redemption.

At night, I slept badly. Not because I felt guilt—guilt requires certainty—but because uncertainty had sharpened into something like anticipation. Anticipation is morally dangerous. It prepares you to accept outcomes you would otherwise refuse.

I remember one briefing in particular. A young analyst—too precise, too earnest—said something like: This feels different.

Different is a word without authority. It demands interpretation.

I nodded. I thanked him. I moved on.

Afterward, alone, I stood by the window and looked out at a city that believed it was being guarded. Lights on. Cafés open. Ordinary time proceeding as if history were not compressed behind it.

I felt something then that I will not dress up:

resentment.

Resentment at normalcy. Resentment at the ease with which people live inside delay. Resentment at the idea that we could go on like this forever—half-war, half-peace, no reckoning, no arrival.

I told myself leadership meant deciding when normalcy must end.

I told myself that if I did not choose the rupture, the rupture would choose us anyway, under worse conditions.

I told myself—this is the lie that completes the circle—that I was protecting the future by allowing the present to break.

And so I waited.

Not passively. Calculatingly.

I waited for history to force its hand.

When October came, I was not surprised.

I was unprepared in the way a man is unprepared when he has decided not to prepare.

That is not ignorance.

It is a choice.

And once made, it cannot be undone by shock, only revealed by it.

When the first reports came in—confused, panicked, undeniable—I felt no triumph. I felt confirmation.

This is what acceleration looks like.

This is what rupture costs.

This is what it takes to end delay.

That is what I told myself.

And that is what would haunt me—not because it was false, but because it was incomplete.

I had believed I was managing time.

I had not yet understood what time would do with me.

Chapter Eight — October 7

There is a moment when information stops being abstract.

It is not the first report. Not the second. It is the moment when the gaps between reports fill in, and the pattern you have been refusing to name steps fully into view.

That morning began the way mornings of power always do—briefings, screens, voices trying to sound steady. The first words were imprecise. Infiltration. Multiple locations. Communication failures. Language scrambling to catch up with reality.

I watched.

That is the word that matters. I watched.

Not from indifference. From distance. Distance is how leaders are trained to function. You do not panic. You do not react. You wait for clarity. You tell yourself that clarity is coming.

The maps lit up.

Dots appeared where they should not have been. Lines broke where they were meant to hold. I recognized the signs immediately, because I had seen them in simulations, in exercises, in theoretical briefings designed to test the imagination.

This was not theoretical.

People began using words like hostages. That word lands differently. Death is final; hostages extend time. They drag the moment forward. They refuse closure. They force negotiation into every future calculation.

I felt something then—not shock, not horror, but tightening.

This was larger than I had allowed myself to imagine.

I had believed in rupture. I had not fully accounted for chaos.

The images came next. Not all at once. Fragments, blurred, raw, impossible to contextualize quickly enough. Civilians running. Families torn apart in real time. Soldiers overwhelmed in places that had been quiet for years.

I felt the room turn toward me, though no one said my name.

This is the moment leaders later describe as surreal. I will not use that word. Surreal implies distance from consequence. This was not distance. This was arrival.

Something had arrived that could not be framed cleanly.

I heard myself asking questions. Mechanical questions. Numbers. Units. Responses. I sounded competent. That mattered. Competence is the last defense against collapse.

Inside, something else was happening.

The clock—the one I had carried for decades—stopped ticking.

It shattered.

Because this was no longer acceleration. This was loss without control.

I had told myself that rupture could be managed. That suffering, if terrible enough, would clarify alignments, justify action, collapse ambiguity. I had told myself that Israeli pain would unify, harden resolve, create the moral capital required for decisive war.

I had not told myself what it would feel like to watch citizens be taken alive.

Hostages do not resolve into strategy. They metastasize into grief.

I watched parents begging on screens that did not know they were being watched. I watched footage loop until it lost meaning and then regained it all at once. I watched the machinery I trusted struggle to respond with the speed I had promised myself it could.

This was not a drill. This was not leverage. This was not a contained rupture.

This was exposure.

I felt anger then—white-hot, clarifying. Anger is useful. Anger simplifies. Anger turns complexity into direction. I let it in because I needed it to stand upright.

They will say later that I was decisive that day. That I spoke firmly. That I rallied the nation. That I promised retaliation.

All of that is true.

What is also true is that somewhere beneath the speeches, beneath the resolve, beneath the declarations of unity, a quieter voice asked a question I did not allow to finish forming:

Did I mistake inevitability for permission?

I shut it down.

Leaders cannot indulge counterfactuals while the ground is burning. That is what I told myself. Reflection is for later. Action is for now.

But the image of hostages stayed with me. Not as symbols. As interruptions. They interrupted the narrative I had prepared. They complicated the moral clarity I had expected to emerge from catastrophe.

War is cleaner when the dead stay dead.

I authorized what needed to be authorized. Mobilization. Retaliation. Emergency measures that would have been impossible the day before and trivialized the day after.

The nation rallied. Fear hardened into resolve. Anger found direction.

The world watched.

Some with sympathy. Some with calculation. Some with the patience of those who know time will do its work regardless of outrage.

I told myself this was the turning point. That the unbearable price would purchase an unbearable truth: that the region could not continue in managed half-life. That something final would now be required.

I did not yet say the word war the way it would later be said. But it was already there, coiled.

As the day unfolded, reports grew darker. The scope widened. The number climbed.

Each new confirmation closed a door I would not be able to reopen.

This is the moment people later ask about. This is the moment history interrogates.

They ask: What did you know?

They ask: What did you feel?

They ask: Would you have done anything differently?

I knew enough.

I felt too much and not enough.

And difference had already been priced out of the day.

By nightfall, the country was no longer the same. Neither was I.

I stood before cameras and spoke of resolve, of unity, of a war for survival. My voice did not shake. That matters in moments like this. A shaking voice invites doubt.

Inside, I was rearranging the future.

The rupture had come. Not as I imagined it. Not under control. But it had come.

Now the question was no longer whether to accelerate history.

The question was how far I would go once acceleration could no longer be paused.

I looked at the screens one last time before leaving the room.

I saw a mother screaming a name that would not be answered.

I told myself—this is the truth I cannot escape—that everything after this would be justified by this moment.

And that belief, once installed, would authorize things I had not yet allowed myself to imagine.

The clock was gone.

Only momentum remained.

And momentum does not ask permission.

Chapter Nine — Momentum

Momentum feels like relief at first.

After October 7, decisions no longer required persuasion. The arguments that had slowed everything for years—proportionality, restraint, optics, long-term consequences—fell silent under the weight of grief. Silence is not peace. It is clearance.

The cabinet moved quickly. Too quickly, some would say later. I would say: finally.

Mobilization is intoxicating. You watch a state remember how to be a machine. Orders flow downward. Compliance rises upward. The friction that once defined every policy debate

vanishes, replaced by alignment born of fear and fury. This is what people mean when they say a nation “comes together.” They rarely examine what is being assembled, or at whose expense.

I spoke of objectives. Destroy capability. Restore deterrence. Ensure it never happens again.

Never again is a phrase that ends conversations. It is also a phrase that permits almost anything once invoked sincerely enough.

The first days blurred. Strikes. Statements. Calls from allies who wanted reassurance more than explanation. Calls from critics who wanted restraint without responsibility. I learned quickly which calls to return and which to let age into irrelevance.

Momentum rewards decisiveness, not doubt.

I told myself—honestly—that there was no alternative. That the scale of the attack had foreclosed nuance. That anything less than overwhelming force would invite repetition. That mercy now would be cruelty later.

These are not slogans. They are beliefs. Beliefs are more durable than propaganda because they do not require constant reinforcement. They reinforce themselves.

As the operation expanded, the language shifted. Targets became zones. Zones became systems. Systems became environments. Every step abstracted the human body further from the decision-making table. Abstraction is not dehumanization by intent; it is dehumanization by efficiency.

I approved plans that would have been unthinkable weeks earlier. I signed off on measures that collapsed distinction in the name of urgency. I listened to legal advisors explain thresholds and exceptions until exceptions began to feel like the rule.

They told me we were within the law.

I did not ask what the law would become afterward.

Casualty numbers rose. I stopped asking for daily totals. Totals invite reckoning. Trends invite management. I preferred trends.

International pressure mounted. Statements hardened. Words like disproportionate returned, stripped of the hesitancy they had carried before. I treated them as noise. Noise is the tax of power.

Privately, some advisors warned of long-term consequences. Radicalization. Isolation. Moral erosion. I listened and filed the warnings where I filed all such things: under after.

After is a dangerous folder. It grows thick and never empties.

Hostages complicated everything. They refused clean escalation. Every strike risked them. Every pause emboldened those holding them. Their existence pulled the future in opposite directions at once. I told myself the responsibility lay with their captors. That is a legally sound argument. It is not a human one.

I watched families speak. I avoided watching too long.

Leadership requires selection. You cannot carry every grief. That is true. It is also how grief becomes manageable enough to proceed through.

The war expanded not because I wanted endless war, but because containment had failed. Or so I told myself. I said we were finishing what had been left unfinished. I said this was the cost of clarity.

Clarity is another word that conceals appetite.

Months passed. The operation did not conclude. It metastasized. Each phase justified the next. Each objective achieved revealed a deeper one beneath it. Victory kept moving because the conditions for declaring it were never fully defined.

That is not an accident.

Undefined victory keeps momentum alive.

I told myself this was necessary because stopping would mean admitting the world would not be reordered by force alone. Admitting that would reopen the question I had closed long ago: whether acceleration was ever the right answer.

I could not reopen that question. Too much depended on it remaining shut.

By the end of the first year, the language outside had shifted again. The word genocide entered the discourse, first cautiously, then insistently. I rejected it categorically. Not because it was morally loaded—everything was morally loaded by then—but because it threatened to collapse complexity into judgment.

Judgment is what momentum cannot survive.

I spoke instead of intent, of context, of unprecedented conditions. All true. All insufficient.

Inside, I felt something erode—not conscience, which is too simple a word—but imagination. The ability to imagine an end that did not look like exhaustion. The ability to imagine coexistence after this much blood. The ability to imagine myself stepping aside without the entire structure collapsing.

Power narrows the future until only one path looks possible.

That path was now two years long.

Two years of operations, pauses, escalations, negotiations that failed just late enough to justify continuing. Two years in which the country hardened and the world divided and the word temporary lost its meaning.

I oversaw it all with a steadiness that would later be described as resolve.

Resolve is what momentum calls itself when it wants to be admired.

At night, sometimes, the old sentence returned—not as clock, not as command, but as accusation I could no longer place.

Many hours have already passed.

And still—nothing had arrived.

No redemption.

No resolution.

No clarity that endured longer than the next briefing.

Only momentum, carrying us forward because stopping now would require something I no longer trusted myself to do.

Admit that acceleration had become destruction.

Admit that I had mistaken movement for meaning.

Admit that time cannot be forced without forcing bodies to pay.

I did not admit these things.

Not yet.

Momentum does not allow confession. It only allows continuation.

And so we continued.

Chapter Ten — Two Years

Time did not slow the war.

It thinned it.

After the first year, outrage lost its pitch. Headlines shortened. Statements became procedural. Even condemnation learned how to conserve energy. This is what endurance looks like from the outside: not agreement, but exhaustion.

Inside the machinery, the war became routine.

Briefings no longer opened with shock but with sequencing. Phase this. Delay that. Pressure here, restraint there. The language matured into something bloodless and efficient. You can run a war for a long time if you learn how not to speak about it.

I did not stop believing we were right. That belief was no longer fragile enough to need reinforcement. It had hardened into atmosphere. Like gravity, it did not require argument. It simply was.

Casualties—Israeli, Palestinian—became statistics not because I denied their humanity, but because humanity does not scale. States scale. War scales. Leaders who try to feel everything either break or become performative. I chose not to perform.

People will say later that this was indifference. It wasn't. It was triage.

You choose what you can afford to feel.

The word genocide did not leave. It gathered weight. Courts entertained it. Activists marched it. Allies learned to say concerns with practiced neutrality. I rejected the term publicly every time. Not out of denial, but out of strategy. Once you accept the language of absolute judgment, negotiation collapses. And I was not ready to collapse.

Privately, I understood why the word persisted.

Not because it fit neatly—but because it named scale.

Scale is what frightens people. Scale implies loss of control. It suggests that intention no longer matters once outcomes accumulate beyond explanation.

I told myself intention still mattered.

I told myself that the objective remained destruction of threat, not people. I told myself that responsibility lay with those who embedded themselves among civilians. I told myself the law recognized this distinction, even if the world pretended not to.

All of that was true.

And still, something else was also true:

The longer it went on, the harder it became to imagine stopping without humiliation.

Stopping is not neutral. Stopping rewrites the past. It reframes every sacrifice as questionable. It opens space for accusations that cannot be managed with momentum alone.

I could not allow that.

The hostages were the sharpest blade. Their presence cut in all directions. Every family's plea landed as both moral demand and strategic threat. Concessions risked repetition. Refusal hardened grief into fury. There was no clean move left.

I learned to speak about them carefully—enough empathy to remain human, enough distance to remain operational.

I told myself the captors held responsibility.

I did not tell myself what the families felt when they heard that sentence repeated.

Internationally, alliances shifted. Some tightened. Some thinned. A new American administration arrived later than I had hoped and then—unexpectedly—another returned. The return was framed as disruption. I framed it as alignment.

Pressure eased in some corridors. Tightened in others. The war adapted. It always does.

I began to feel old.

Not tired—old.

There is a difference. Tired men want rest. Old men want conclusion.

But conclusion did not present itself.

Every attempt at ceasefire arrived with conditions that threatened the story I had been telling myself for decades. That pressure must be maintained. That delay is failure. That stopping before clarity is surrender.

I watched the country change. Language sharpened. Patience thinned. Empathy narrowed. Dissent became suspect. Loyalty became louder. The center hollowed out.

I told myself this was the price of survival.

The truth—one I could not afford to examine too closely—was that survival had become indistinguishable from dominance.

By the end of the second year, the war no longer felt like response. It felt like inertia.

Inertia is dangerous because it has no villain you can point to. It continues not because anyone wants it to, but because too many structures depend on it continuing.

I depended on it.

As long as the war lasted, the question of my responsibility remained deferred. As long as momentum held, reckoning stayed theoretical. As long as pressure existed, the clock could not accuse me of waiting.

Many hours had passed.

And still, nothing had arrived.

No Moshiach.

No closure.

No absolution.

Only a thinning world and a future that felt increasingly brittle.

This is when doubt began to return—not as fear, but as irritation.

I was irritated by the lack of revelation. By the stubbornness of history. By the fact that after so much blood, so much force, so much insistence, the world remained unresolved.

I had accelerated everything.

Why had nothing opened?

That question did not yet have a name.

But it had begun to speak.

And I could no longer silence it with momentum alone.

Chapter Eleven — The Return of Permission

Power does not always arrive as command.

Sometimes it arrives as relief.

When the American election tipped—slowly at first, then all at once—I felt something in the machinery around me loosen. Not because a man had won, but because a posture had returned. Familiar language. Familiar instincts. A shared impatience with restraint dressed up as virtue.

People outside would call it polarization. I experienced it as alignment.

The phone calls changed tone before they changed content. Words like concern and restraint receded. In their place came phrases I recognized immediately: sovereignty, decisiveness, ending wars by winning them. These phrases do not end wars. They extend them until exhaustion can be mistaken for resolution.

I told myself this was temporary leverage.

Temporary things have a way of settling in.

With the change in Washington came a recalibration elsewhere. Allies adjusted their expectations. Critics softened their language. Courts moved more carefully. Nothing dramatic. Nothing explicit. Just enough friction removed to remind me how much resistance had been artificial to begin with.

Permission does not need to be spoken to be felt.

I did not celebrate. Celebration would have been unseemly. Instead, I allowed myself something more dangerous: confidence that the pressure could be sustained a little longer. That the war could be held in place until it finally produced the clarity I had promised myself all along.

This is how wars become seasons.

Not beginnings. Not endings. Seasons.

I told myself we were closer now. That the world had stopped pretending it could impose its morality on us without consequence. That reality had reasserted itself.

Reality, however, remained stubborn.

The war continued to grind. Hostages remained unresolved. Gaza remained shattered. Israeli society remained tense, divided between those who believed we had gone too far and those who believed we had not gone far enough.

Those divisions no longer frightened me. Division can be governed. Consensus is harder.

I watched younger politicians attempt to claim moral high ground. They spoke of futures. Of rebuilding. Of international legitimacy. I heard in their voices the same faith in time I had lost decades earlier.

They still believed waiting could heal.

I no longer believed that.

And yet—this is the thing I did not anticipate—permission did not bring satisfaction. It brought exposure. With fewer constraints, the absence of resolution became harder to excuse. Without constant external pressure, the war's continuation looked less like necessity and more like insistence.

Insistence requires explanation.

I found myself speaking more often of destiny again, of history's long arc, of the cost of Jewish survival. These words had once energized me. Now they felt repetitive. Defensive. As if I were convincing myself rather than others.

The Rebbe's sentence returned—not as command, not as clock, but as echo.

Many hours have already passed.

The hours had become years.

And still, nothing had arrived to justify them.

The ceasefire talks resumed not because we had reached clarity, but because everything had begun to fray at once. Military readiness. Economic patience. Social cohesion. International tolerance.

Systems do not collapse all at once. They sag.

I watched the sagging and felt something unfamiliar: not fear, not guilt, but fatigue with my own certainty.

I had built my life on the idea that delay was sin. That pressure was faith. That acceleration would force revelation.

Now I was living inside the outcome of that belief.

And revelation had not come.

Only debris.

When the ceasefire finally took shape—temporary, conditional, fragile—I accepted it publicly with the language of prudence. Privately, it felt like a verdict.

Not imposed from outside.

From within.

Because a ceasefire is not peace. It is admission that force has reached its explanatory limit.

The war paused.

The clock did not restart.

It simply stared back at me.

This was the moment when the story I had been telling myself for thirty years finally began to crack—not because I had lost power, but because power had failed to deliver what it had promised.

Acceleration had not brought redemption.

It had brought endurance without meaning.

And endurance, without meaning, is indistinguishable from exile.

I did not yet know what would interrupt that realization.

I only knew that something would have to.

Because the old answers no longer held.

And the hours—merciless, ordinary—kept passing anyway.

Chapter Twelve — The Pause

A ceasefire does not feel like peace.

It feels like the sudden absence of noise after years of living beside a generator. Your ears keep ringing. Your body stays braced. You wait for the hum to return, because silence has learned how to lie.

When the ceasefire was announced, I stood before cameras and spoke the language expected of me. Operational necessity. Humanitarian considerations. Strategic recalibration. Words that allow a man to step back without admitting retreat.

The country exhaled unevenly. Some with relief. Some with rage. Some with the particular bitterness reserved for pauses that feel unearned. A ceasefire offends those who have organized their grief around continuation. It interrupts the meaning they have been making of loss.

I understood that instinct. I had lived inside it.

The war did not end. It thinned. Aid moved. Bombs paused. Negotiators spoke in rooms where clocks were watched more carefully than faces. Hostages returned in fragments, exchanges staged like morality plays with no author willing to claim the script.

Every return was both miracle and indictment.

I attended meetings where generals spoke of readiness and ministers spoke of optics. The machinery adjusted. It always does. Institutions are remarkable that way. They survive almost any moral weather as long as their procedures remain intact.

What did not adjust was me.

For the first time in years, I woke without an immediate decision demanding me. No emergency vote. No authorization required before dawn. The absence was disorienting. I had built my sense of self on response. Without it, I felt exposed.

I began to notice things I had trained myself not to see.

The way people spoke more cautiously around me now—not deferentially, but diagnostically. As if measuring whether the version of me they had depended on still existed. As if preparing for an adjustment they could not yet name.

I noticed the way my own language lagged behind my thoughts. I reached for familiar phrases and felt them fail to land even in my own mind. Security. Deterrence. Resolve. They sounded like relics from a previous era of myself.

The pause did something worse than threaten my authority.

It threatened my explanation.

For decades, I had told myself—and others—that delay was the enemy. That pressure was the engine of history. That if suffering was terrible enough, it would force arrival. That arrival—redemption, resolution, clarity—would justify everything that preceded it.

Now suffering had been unbearable.

And nothing had arrived.

No reckoning that felt clean.

No moral clarity that endured.

No future that made the past intelligible.

Only exhaustion.

I watched the country argue with itself. Families of hostages demanding continuation and cessation in the same breath. Protesters calling for my removal. Others insisting I remain. The split no longer mapped cleanly onto ideology. It mapped onto temperament. Onto what people could still bear.

For the first time, I allowed myself to ask a question I had treated as treasonous for most of my life:

What if waiting is not the sin I believed it to be?

The question did not bring comfort. It brought vertigo.

If waiting is not sin, then acceleration was not faith.

If acceleration was not faith, then pressure was not obedience.

If pressure was not obedience, then what had I been serving?

I did not like where that logic led.

So I busied myself. Committees. Briefings. Long-term planning that pretended long term was still intact. I spoke of rebuilding, of deterrence restored, of lessons learned. These phrases satisfied no one, but they filled time.

Time, once my enemy, now pressed in from the other side.

Many hours have already passed.

The sentence returned again—not accusing, not commanding, but stripped bare.

Hours pass whether you force them or not.

History does not respond to coercion the way I believed it would. It absorbs it. It metabolizes it. It moves on carrying the scar tissue quietly forward.

I had forced history.

History had not complied.

In the weeks after the ceasefire, I began receiving requests I would once have dismissed without thought. Meetings framed not as opposition but as alternative. Proposals that did not argue with my past but refused to extend it.

I ignored most of them.

One, I did not.

Not because it came with power behind it. Not because it offered absolution. But because it did something unfamiliar.

It did not accuse me of delay.

It accused me of misunderstanding time itself.

That meeting would come later.

For now, I sat inside the pause, surrounded by the residue of motion, trying to understand how a man who had built his life on acceleration could survive a moment that demanded something else entirely.

Not speed.

Not force.

But restraint I had never learned to practice without calling it betrayal.

The pause did not end the story.

It broke its rhythm.

And in that broken rhythm, a different question began to form—one I could no longer dismiss as weakness:

What if redemption is delayed not because we have not pushed hard enough...

...but because we have pushed at the wrong thing?

I did not yet know the answer.

I only knew that the old one had failed.

And that the hours—indifferent, unseduced—kept passing anyway.

Chapter Thirteen — The Interruption

I had grown accustomed to being addressed through intermediaries.

Staff. Envoys. Advisors who filtered language before it reached me, sanding down edges, translating urgency into politeness. Directness is rare around power. People learn quickly that honesty is inefficient when someone else controls the outcome.

So when the request came without ornament—no flattery, no positioning, no appeal to legacy—I noticed.

It was not framed as opposition. Not framed as reconciliation. It did not demand resignation or repentance or explanation. It asked for a meeting, nothing more.

The name attached to it meant nothing to me at first.

Shaina Atira Aliza Aber.

Not a diplomat. Not a general. Not a donor. Not a politician. Not someone whose relevance could be plotted on the usual maps. That alone was reason to dismiss it.

I almost did.

What stopped me was the way the request was written. It did not argue with my record. It did not rehearse my crimes or my achievements. It did not threaten or plead.

It stated a premise.

That the problem was not that we had failed to bring redemption.

It was that we had mistaken domination for holiness.

I read it twice. Then a third time, irritated by how little it tried to persuade me.

People who want something from you usually work harder.

This one assumed I would listen—or not—and proceed regardless.

That kind of confidence is either madness or clarity. I have learned not to dismiss either too quickly.

I asked for a briefing. There was very little to give. She was known, if at all, as an intellectual irritant. A religious thinker who refused neat categories. Someone who spoke about Torah ethics not as heritage or identity, but as binding constraint on power itself.

Constraint.

The word landed badly.

Torah as constraint is an old idea. An inconvenient one. It had been years since anyone had tried to apply it to me without first stripping it of teeth.

I delayed the meeting once. Then again.

Delay is a reflex. When something threatens your internal architecture, you slow it down and hope it loses momentum. But this request did not fade. It did not escalate either. It simply remained.

Eventually, I agreed.

Not because I was persuaded.

Because I was curious.

The meeting was arranged without ceremony. No cameras. No press. No symbolic setting. Just a room that had hosted countless conversations meant to disappear into institutional memory.

She did not arrive deferentially.

She did not arrive hostile.

She arrived as if time were not scarce.

That irritated me immediately.

People who understand urgency perform it. People who refuse to perform it often understand something you don't.

She did not thank me for meeting her.

She did not apologize for the intrusion.

She did not begin with October 7, or Gaza, or the war, or the dead.

She began with the Rebbe.

“You were told,” she said, without preamble, “that many hours had already passed.”

I felt something tighten in my chest. I had not mentioned that meeting publicly in years.

“You heard urgency,” she continued. “But you interpreted it as acceleration.”

I did not interrupt her. That surprised me.

“You thought delay was the sin,” she said. “So you tried to force arrival.”

Her voice was calm. Not accusing. Almost... explanatory.

“And when force failed,” she went on, “you doubled it.”

I leaned back, arms crossed. This posture usually signals dominance. In that moment, it felt defensive.

“You don’t know what pressure we’re under,” I said finally.

She nodded. “I do,” she replied. “That’s why this matters.”

She spoke then of an idea she said had come to her years earlier—not as policy, not as campaign, but as ethical architecture. She called it, without irony, the Shainastine Plan.

A bi-national state.

Equal citizenship.

No supremacy sanctified by theology.

A government bound explicitly by Torah ethics—not as identity, not as inheritance, but as law against power itself.

I almost laughed.

“Do you know what that would do?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said. “It would end your logic.”

That answer landed harder than any argument.

She did not say it would end violence. Or solve history. Or bring peace.

She said it would end my logic.

She spoke of Torah not as promise but as restraint. Of chosenness not as privilege but as burden. Of messianism not as arrival but as refusal to rule unjustly while waiting.

“The Rebbe,” she said, “did not tell you to hurry history.”

She paused.

“He told you not to make peace with injustice.”

I felt anger rise. Real anger. The kind that precedes dismissal.

“You think you understand him better than I do?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “I think you misunderstood him in the way powerful men often misunderstand ethical urgency.”

I stood. I had ended meetings for less.

But she was not finished.

“You tried to bring Moshiach by force,” she said. “That’s why he didn’t come.”

Silence settled between us.

Not dramatic silence. Evaluative silence.

“For two years,” she continued, “you oversaw destruction believing it would clarify reality. All it clarified was that power without restraint turns even holy language into a weapon.”

I wanted to respond with something sharp. Something that would restore balance. Instead, I found myself asking a question I had not planned to ask:

“And what makes you think your plan wouldn’t just delay everything again?”

She looked at me steadily.

“Because it doesn’t try to end waiting,” she said. “It tries to make waiting ethical.”

Ethical waiting.

The phrase felt foreign.

“You believe,” she said, “that time accuses us. I believe time tests us.”

I said nothing.

“You built your life on the fear that if you didn’t act, something worse would happen,” she went on. “And you were right.”

She paused again.

“But you never asked whether what happened under your action was worse.”

That was the moment the meeting stopped being theoretical.

Not because she was right.

But because I could not immediately prove her wrong.

She stood to leave. She did not ask for my agreement. She did not ask for endorsement. She did not ask for power.

She left me with one sentence.

“Redemption that requires injustice to arrive is not delayed,” she said. “It is refused.”

After she left, I remained standing longer than necessary.

The room felt different—not smaller, not larger, but misaligned. As if a load-bearing wall had been identified as decorative all along.

I told myself I would forget the conversation.

I did not.

For the first time since 1990, the Rebbe’s sentence returned without urgency.

Many hours have already passed.

This time, I did not hear a clock.

I heard a question.

And I did not know how to answer it without dismantling the life I had built around never asking it at all.

Chapter Fourteen — Torah Against Power

I did not sleep that night.

Not from fear. From reorientation.

There is a difference between being challenged and being reframed. Challenges bounce off the armor you have spent decades forging. Reframing reaches behind the armor and adjusts the spine itself. You wake up upright in a body that no longer feels like yours.

I replayed the meeting with Shaina Atira Aliza Aber not as argument, but as structure. She had not tried to persuade me. She had not tried to win. She had simply declined my premises and proceeded as if they were already obsolete.

That is how revolutions begin—not with opposition, but with irrelevance.

I reached instinctively for the old defenses.

Naïveté, I told myself.

Idealism without blood knowledge.

A plan that collapses under the first test of reality.

I have dismantled dozens of proposals with those phrases. They usually work because most proposals want legitimacy from power. This one didn't.

She had not asked me to approve anything.

She had asked me to recognize something.

That distinction unsettled me.

I thought of Torah—real Torah, not slogans. Of kings constrained by prophets. Of Saul losing his crown not because he was weak, but because he overreached. Of David punished not for ambition, but for forgetting that power answers upward before it answers outward.

These were not stories I quoted often. Constraint is not a popular genre among rulers.

I had spent decades treating Torah as inheritance and shield—proof of right, proof of continuity, proof that we are not like others. But Shaina spoke of Torah as handbrake. As an instrument designed precisely for moments like this, when power believes itself necessary.

Necessary power is the most dangerous kind.

I told myself—truthfully—that her plan would tear the country apart. That a bi-national state would ignite violence. That equality enforced before trust would collapse into bloodshed.

All true.

But not complete.

Because what she was really saying was this: that bloodshed had already become the organizing principle, and I had mistaken it for inevitability.

I paced the room.

If Torah binds power, then what had I been doing all these years?

I had believed myself a guardian of Jewish survival. But guardianship, I now saw, is not the same as domination. One preserves the vulnerable. The other multiplies vulnerability while claiming necessity.

I remembered the Rebbe again—his eyes, not severe, not indulgent. Expectant.

He had not said hurry history.

He had said do not make peace with exile.

I had interpreted exile as geopolitical weakness.

What if exile was ethical failure?

That thought landed like a fracture.

If exile is ethical, then redemption is not arrival. It is restraint practiced while waiting.

Ethical waiting.

I had mocked that concept my entire life.

Waiting had felt like cowardice. Like betrayal of urgency. Like complicity with threat.

But what if waiting—real waiting—was not passivity, but refusal to rule unjustly even when you could?

What if the sin was not delay...

...but impatience sanctified by theology?

I sat down heavily.

For the first time in decades, I allowed myself to imagine a future that did not require me.

Not a retirement. Not a legacy. A release.

The thought frightened me more than any court or protest ever had.

If I am not necessary, then what have I done?

If domination is not holiness, then what has all this blood been serving?

I understood then why Shaina had not argued details. Why she had not debated borders or security arrangements or constitutional mechanics. Those conversations happen after a moral frame is accepted.

She had gone for the frame.

Torah not as destiny.

Messiah not as deadline.

Power not as proof.

She had placed Torah back where it was most dangerous to me: above the state.

I did not convert. I did not repent. I did not suddenly agree.

But something shifted that could not be unshifted.

The clock was gone.

In its place was something heavier.

Responsibility without acceleration.

Waiting without domination.

Power without permission to sanctify itself.

I realized then that the most radical thing her plan offered was not coexistence.

It was limitation.

And limitation—true limitation—is what I had spent my entire life fleeing.

I looked out the window as dawn began to thin the dark.

The city stirred. Ordinary time resumed. People moved without knowing that a man who had governed them for decades was sitting with a thought he had never allowed himself to finish.

That Torah might not justify my power.

That messianism might condemn my haste.

That redemption might require me to stop.

Not stop governing.

Stop forcing.

The irony cut deep.

I had tried to bring Moshiach by acceleration.

She had suggested he would only come when power learned how to wait without killing to fill the silence.

I did not yet know what I would do with this realization.

But I knew this:

If the Rebbe were sitting across from me now, he would not ask how many hours had passed.

He would ask what I had done with restraint while they passed.

And for the first time, I did not have an answer ready.

Chapter Fifteen — The Shape of an Ending

Power does not collapse when questioned.

It calcifies.

That was my first instinct after the meeting, after the night without sleep, after the thought I could not return to storage: to harden. To seal the fracture with routine. To let the machinery resume its familiar rhythm and bury the interruption under motion.

Motion has always been my refuge.

But motion no longer obeyed me the way it once had. It felt loud. Performative. Like pacing in a room that has already told you the truth.

I went through the days as expected of me. Briefings. Statements. Calculated silences. The choreography held. From the outside, nothing had changed.

Inside, everything had.

For the first time, I saw the end of my rule not as defeat or triumph, but as shape. A shape I would choose or refuse. A shape that would either confirm the logic I had lived by—or finally contradict it.

I had always assumed the end would be forced on me: indictment, collapse, rebellion, death. Those are the endings history offers men who insist too loudly.

Shaina's interruption suggested a different ending.

Voluntary limitation.

That idea is obscene to power. Power understands conquest, survival, overthrow. It does not understand surrender that is not coerced. It does not understand a man stepping aside because the logic itself has failed.

And yet, that was the shape now pressing at the edges of my days.

If I continued as I had, the war would resume its momentum. The ceasefire would break. The machinery would grind back into motion. I knew how to do that. I was very good at it. I could still command fear. I could still organize outrage. I could still turn delay into justification.

But now I could see the cost clearly enough to name it.

Not just Palestinian lives.

Not just Israeli lives.

But the permanent conversion of Torah into permission.

If I continued, Torah would not restrain power in this land for a generation. It would be remembered only as weapon and excuse. A vocabulary of entitlement, emptied of its terror-for-the-king.

I had turned chosenness into exemption.

That realization did not produce remorse. Remorse looks backward. This looked forward.

What kind of ending leaves something usable behind?

Not redemption. Not peace. Those words had become too large to hold honestly.

But perhaps—limit.

A limit that could not be dismissed as weakness because it was chosen at the height of capacity. A limit that could not be reframed as defeat because it would not be imposed.

I began to imagine what it would mean to say, publicly, that Jewish power must be bound by Torah ethics in ways that cost Jews power.

Not rhetorically. Structurally.

To say that supremacy is forbidden.

That domination delays redemption rather than hastens it.

That Jewish survival does not require Jewish rule over another people.

The thought was politically suicidal.

It was also the first thought in decades that did not feel like acceleration.

I thought of the Rebbe again—not as clock, not as judge, but as witness.

He had lived his entire life without a state. Without an army. Without the intoxication of sovereignty. And yet he had believed, utterly, in Jewish responsibility.

Not Jewish victory.

Responsibility.

I had mistaken one for the other.

I asked myself the question I had avoided since 1990:

What if my task was not to bring Moshiach?

What if my task was simply not to block him?

Blocking, I now understood, does not look like disbelief.

It looks like impatience armed with tanks.

I did not decide anything that day. Decisions require courage of a particular kind—the courage to be remembered wrongly by your own side.

I was not sure I had that courage.

But I knew this much:

I could no longer pretend the ending would be imposed on me.

The ending was approaching either way.

The only question left was whether it would confirm my life's logic...

...or finally break it.

And for the first time since Brooklyn, since the sentence that turned time into accusation, I allowed myself to imagine an answer that did not involve force.

The hours would pass regardless.

The only thing still undecided was whether I would continue to spend them as if they were mine to command.

Or finally acknowledge that they never were.

Chapter Sixteen — What I Cannot Control

There is a lie power tells itself at the end.

It says: You still have time.

Not time in the ordinary sense—years, terms, elections—but time to shape the story. Time to manage memory. Time to decide how what you have done will be understood once you are no longer the one explaining it.

I had lived inside that lie for decades.

Now it was thinning.

After the pause, after the interruption, after the fracture that refused to close, I began to notice how little I actually controlled. Not events—I had never controlled those as much as people imagined—but interpretation. Interpretation had slipped out of my hands while I was still holding the office.

People were already telling my story without me.

Some told it as tragedy. A man who tried to protect his people and was crushed by impossible circumstances. Others told it as villainy. A man who chose domination and mistook it for destiny. Still others told it as inevitability, which is the laziest narrative of all. Inevitability absolves everyone.

None of them asked the question that now haunted me.

What if power itself had been the test?

Not whether I could wield it. I had proven that.

Not whether I could survive it. I had done that too.

But whether I could limit it.

I had always believed limitation would come from outside—from courts, allies, coalitions, uprisings. I had spent my life outrunning those limits, bending them, exhausting them, proving that I could remain standing when others fell.

I had never seriously considered that limitation might have to come from me.

This is the hardest thought a ruler can entertain, because it offers no audience applause. There is no parade for restraint. No statue for refusal. No anthem for stepping back before collapse.

There is only loss—immediate, loud, personal.

Loss of allies who depended on you being what you were.

Loss of certainty that justified the blood already spilled.

Loss of the illusion that history needed you to continue as you had begun.

I thought of Shaina again—not as adversary, not as prophet, but as interruption. She had not asked me to dismantle the state. She had asked me to dismantle the logic that sanctified its excess.

The Shainastine Plan, as she had named it, was not really a plan in the way politicians understand plans. It was an accusation disguised as architecture.

If Torah binds power, then the state must be willing to lose power in order to remain Jewish.

That sentence alone was enough to end a career.

And yet—it was the first sentence in years that felt as if it belonged to Torah rather than to fear.

I imagined what it would mean to speak it aloud. To say that Jewish ethics do not culminate in sovereignty, but in responsibility that survives sovereignty. To say that messianism is not something you force by domination, but something you make space for by refusing to rule unjustly while waiting.

I imagined the outrage. The betrayal. The way my own supporters would turn on me with a ferocity usually reserved for enemies. I imagined being remembered as the man who broke the right rather than the man who hardened it.

That fear was real.

But beneath it was something quieter.

Relief.

Relief at the possibility that the story might end without further acceleration. That the machine might be slowed not by collapse, but by decision. That the hours might pass without needing to be spent in blood.

I did not become a hero in that imagining. I became smaller.

Smaller is not an insult. It is a correction.

For most of my life, I had believed the world was asking too much of me. That the weight was unbearable. That history had placed me under impossible demand.

Now I wondered if I had been asking too much of the world instead.

Too much blood.

Too much patience.

Too much forgiveness for decisions made in the name of urgency.

I do not know how this ends.

Anyone who tells you they know the ending of history is lying—or selling something.

I know only this:

If I leave behind a state where Torah is remembered only as justification, then I have failed, no matter how long I ruled.

If I leave behind a crack—just a crack—where power is forced to answer upward again, where messianism is disentangled from domination, where waiting is reclaimed as ethical rather than cowardly, then perhaps something will survive me that does not require my name to defend itself.

The Rebbe once told me many hours had already passed.

He did not say what to do with the ones that remained.

That, I understand now, was never meant to be dictated.

It was meant to be chosen.

And the choice I avoided for thirty years—the choice not to force the end—has returned, patient, unafraid, indifferent to my legacy.

The hours will pass whether I act or not.

The only question left is whether I will finally allow them to pass without trying to own them.

That is not a triumphant ending.

But it may be the first honest one.

Chapter Seventeen — Choosing to Stop Forcing

The hardest decision I ever faced did not arrive with urgency.

It arrived quietly, without deadline, without leverage, without applause.

That is how I knew it was real.

For weeks after the pause, I continued as if nothing had changed. That is what men like me do when the ground shifts beneath us—we keep walking the old route until the body understands what the mind resists. I signed documents. I chaired meetings. I spoke the language of continuity with enough fluency that no one could accuse me of hesitation.

But inside, the engine had lost its justification.

I could still accelerate.

That was the revelation that mattered.

Even now—after the war, after the accusations, after the exhaustion—I could still restart momentum. I could provoke. I could escalate. I could speak the words that would collapse the ceasefire and return the country to the rhythm it had learned to endure.

The machinery was intact.

Which meant that stopping would not be mistaken for incapacity.

It would be unmistakably chosen.

I understood then why this moment frightened me more than any court or protest ever had. If the war resumed, history would judge me harshly or kindly, but it would judge me within the logic I had built. Force would still be the grammar.

If I stopped—truly stopped—there would be no grammar left to hide in.

Only responsibility.

I met again with no one official.

That mattered.

No coalition partners. No generals. No strategists. No religious figures prepared to bless whatever I decided after the fact. I did not want validation. Validation would have tipped me back into performance.

Instead, I reread things I had not touched in years. Not policy papers. Not intelligence assessments.

Torah.

Not the parts I liked to quote. Not the parts that justified endurance or conquest or chosenness. The parts that terrify kings. The parts that assume power will lie to itself. The parts that treat rulers as the most dangerous category of human being.

Limits on horses.

Limits on wives.

Limits on wealth.

Limits on glory.

Limits, everywhere.

I had spent my life treating those passages as historical artifacts—lessons from a time before sovereignty returned. But now I saw the truth I had avoided:

Those limits exist because sovereignty returns.

Not to prevent power.

To restrain it.

For the first time, I allowed myself to name what I had done without dressing it up as necessity.

I had treated suffering as instrument.

I had mistaken endurance for redemption.

I had confused urgency with obedience.

None of that made me uniquely evil.

It made me ordinary in the way powerful men have always been ordinary.

That recognition did not crush me.

It steadied me.

I drafted nothing.

I announced nothing.

But I made one decision that mattered more than any statement.

I would not restart the war.

Not covertly.

Not rhetorically.

Not by omission.

Whatever violence followed would not be summoned by my impatience.

This was not peace.

This was restraint.

And restraint, I now understood, is not passive. It requires you to absorb accusation without counterattack. To endure being called weak by those who depend on your hardness to justify their own. To accept that your final act may look, to many, like betrayal rather than courage.

I began to speak differently—not expansively, not ideologically, but narrowly and precisely. About limits. About responsibility. About the danger of confusing survival with domination.

I did not propose the Shainastine Plan.

Not yet.

Plans are weapons if introduced too early. What mattered first was to change what could be said without ending the conversation. To reopen ethical vocabulary that had been sealed under emergency.

I said, publicly, that Jewish power must be bound by Jewish law in ways that hurt.

That sentence alone created shockwaves.

I said that messianism cannot be advanced by injustice without becoming idolatry.

That sentence cost me allies.

I said that waiting is not the opposite of action—that sometimes it is the most difficult form of it.

That sentence confused everyone.

Good.

Confusion is a sign that a spell is breaking.

I knew how this would end for me. Not precisely—but structurally.

I would not leave as a savior.

I would not leave as a villain everyone agreed upon.

I would leave as a problem.

A problem that could not be resolved without confronting the logic I had embodied.

That, I now believe, is the only ending that does not lie.

I do not know whether the future will take the shape Shaina described. Bi-national. Equal. Bound explicitly by ethics that refuse supremacy even when supremacy feels efficient.

I know only that such a future cannot begin while power insists on acceleration.

Someone had to stop forcing.

It appears that someone was me.

Not because I was righteous.

But because I was finally tired of mistaking pressure for faith.

The hours continue to pass.

They always will.

For the first time since Brooklyn, I am letting them pass without trying to turn them into a weapon.

If Moshiach comes, he will not come because I hurried him.

If he does not, then at least I will not have added more blood to prove that waiting was unbearable.

That is not redemption.

But it may be repentance of the only kind power is capable of:

Knowing when to stop.

Epilogue — After the Hours

I am no longer certain when the story ends.

That is not false modesty. It is the residue of finally relinquishing control over time.

For most of my life, I believed history needed to be driven. That waiting was weakness. That delay was failure. That if redemption did not arrive, it was because someone had not pushed hard enough, fast enough, ruthlessly enough.

I lived as if the world were late and I were responsible for catching it up.

Now I understand the cruelty of that belief.

Time does not accuse us.

It reveals us.

What it revealed in me was not unique. It was ordinary. A man entrusted with power who mistook pressure for faith, urgency for obedience, domination for responsibility. A man who believed that suffering could be justified if it moved the story forward.

The story did not move.

It thickened. It bled. It endured.

And in the end, endurance—not acceleration—was what remained.

I do not offer repentance as spectacle. I do not offer absolution. Those are comforts I have not earned and do not seek. What I offer is a refusal to complete the arc the way it demanded to be completed.

I refused to end as proof that force works.

If something different emerges from this land—something bound by ethics rather than fear, something that treats Torah not as permission but as limit, something that allows two peoples to remain without one ruling the other—it will not be because I engineered it.

It will be because I stopped blocking it.

That is not redemption.

Redemption does not belong to rulers.

It belongs to restraint practiced when power insists otherwise.

I was once told that many hours had already passed.

I spent decades trying to own those hours.

I no longer do.

They pass on their own, as they always have.

And if the future judges me, let it judge this:

That when acceleration failed,

when force produced only more force,

when urgency became indistinguishable from cruelty,

I chose—late, imperfectly, without applause—to stop.

Not to save my legacy.

But to leave behind at least one broken pattern.

If that is remembered, it will be enough.

If it is forgotten, the hours will still pass.

They always do.

The question, as it turns out, was never how fast.

It was always how carefully.