



Sermon Tidbits

JANUARY 12, 2009

Parashat Shemot

Sacrificing Their Own Children

Kol haben hayilod haye'orah tashlichuhu – “Every son that is born you must cast into the river” (Exodus 1:22)

The rabbis (see Rashi on 1:16) teach us that Pharaoh's sorcerers predicted a redeemer of the Children of Israel would be born. In response to this prophecy Pharaoh commanded the Jewish midwives that, “if it be a son, then you must kill him.” (1:16) However, the midwives refused and assisted in the birth of every Jewish child, male or female. Pharaoh then issued a decree that, “Every son that is born you must cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.” (1:23) Pharaoh did not specify that they kill only the Jewish male children, but rather he commands his subjects to murder every male child born. Rashi notes that the astrologers could not specify whether the savior would be Jewish or Egyptian and therefore Pharaoh decreed that every child be put to death. Protecting his reign was Pharaoh's only concern and the death of thousands of Egyptians was of no concern to him.

Unfortunately, the practice of murdering innocents to protect one's rule is not limited to ancient times. In Israel's ongoing conflict with Hamas in Gaza, the Hamas regime has cynically used its own citizens, and especially its women and children as human shields, sacrificing their lives to protect terrorists. In addition, the Hamas leadership has taken refuge in crowded schools, mosques and other civilian locations, putting innocent civilians directly in harm's way.

The White House recently condemned Hamas for their disregard for civilian safety stating, “As a part of their strategy, Hamas terrorists often hide within the civilian population, which puts innocent Palestinians at risk.” The Iranian-backed terrorist group has been documented firing rockets from UN-run schools and other heavily populated areas, and its fighters have hid in ambulances in the hopes of avoiding the Israeli military. Hamas has become so brazen that Hamas parliamentarian Fathi Hammad explained the use of human shields to Al-Aqsa TV in February, “For the Palestinian people, death has become an industry, this is why they have formed human shields of the women, the children, the elderly, and the mujahedeen, in order to challenge the Zionist bombing machine.”

Recently, as Hamas continued its disdain for human life, Congress passed two resolutions reaffirming Israel's right to defend her citizens. These resolutions call on Hamas to end attacks against Israel, recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce violence, accept previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements, and verifiably dismantle its terrorist infrastructure. The House version, H. Res. 34, passed by an overwhelming majority of 390-5 and the Senate version, S. Res. 10, passed by unanimous consent. To view these resolutions and for more information visit www.aipac.org/takeaction.

Like Pharaoh, the Hamas leadership cares more about its endurance than it does about its own people. Just as Pharaoh ultimately brought destruction to his country, today the horrific policies of Hamas continue to bring misery, suffering and pain to the Palestinian civilians in Gaza, the very people they claim to protect. ■

The Sigh of Frustration

Vayei'anchu b'nei Yisrael – “and the children of Israel sighed” (Exodus 2:23)

Many years after Moses fled from Egypt and settled in Midian the Torah records Pharaoh's death. Yet, instead of rejoicing at the demise of an oppressive tyrant, “the Children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they

cried.” Why did they shed tears for the death Pharaoh? Why did they both sigh and cry? Ramban (on verse 23) explains that “it is custom of slaves to a wicked and evil king that they await and anticipate the day of his death,” in hopes that a new monarch will bring better treatment and the possibility of an improved life. Yet, Ramban continues, “when they saw that the king died they sighed at the appointment of a man more wicked and evil than the first.” Clearly the Children of Israel shed tears due to the pain they were sure to endure, but they sighed from frustration and futility. With the appointment of the new Pharaoh their hopes for the future faded and all they could do was sigh.

The sigh of the Children of Israel was an expression of their frustration, an emotion Israelis today share after years of attacks from Hamas. Yet today, Israel is not resigned to suffering in silence with only a sigh to reflect its pain.

In response to the Hamas attacks on southern Israel in recent weeks, the Jewish State was forced to take action to defend its citizens. Since Israel fully withdrew from Gaza in 2005, Hamas and other terrorist groups have turned the area into a launching pad for attacks against Israel. Following Hamas’ abandonment of a sixth-month lull in fighting with Israel the Iranian-backed terrorist group fired more than 600 projectiles into Israel. Now Hamas is using more advance weapons to increase the number of civilians in range. In addition to mortars, which have a range of six miles, Hamas has fired Qassam rockets (11 mile range), Katyusha and Grad rockets (12.5 mile range) and upgraded Grad rockets (25 mile range) at Israel’s cities. More than 900,000 Israelis are currently within range of Hamas rockets from Gaza. Click [here](#) to view a map of Israeli cities in range of Hamas artillery. Like every other sovereign nation, Israel has the right and duty to defend its citizens from attack.

While in ancient times the Children of Israel could only sigh in frustration at their bondage in Egypt, today Israel has recourse and can its civilians. Only when Hamas forgoes violence can both Israelis and Palestinians end their frustration, stop their sighing, and build a lasting and durable peace. ■

The Importance of Kindness

Lamah zeh azavtem et ha’ish – “Why did you abandon the man?” (Exodus 2:20)

After fleeing from Egypt, Moses arrives in Midian and encounters the daughters of Reuel having some difficulty with the local shepherds. Moses, with his inner sense of kindness and justice, “stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.” (2:17) When Reuel’s daughters arrived home early he asked them how they completed their tasks with such alacrity. Learning of the kindness of the strange Egyptian man, Reuel asks his daughters, “And where is he? Why is it that you have left the man?” (2:20) S’forno explains that Reuel demonstrated goodwill and appreciation for Moses’ act of kindness and reminded his daughters that instead of leaving Moses at the well, “because he is a guest and a man of kindness, you should have repaid him with kindness and invited him as a guest.”

Israel has long followed in Moses’ footsteps of performing acts of kindness. Yet unlike Reuel, who preached kindness in response to kindness, Israel has faced not only a lack of appreciation, but downright hostility.

Israel has long treated patients from Gaza and the West Bank, and continues to do so even during the conflict in Gaza. A recent article on the website Israel21c.org highlighted the fact that Israel routinely treats Palestinians in Israeli hospitals and often pays for that treatment. The World Health Organization reported that, “approximately 60,000 Palestinians from the West Bank area have been treated in Israel hospitals over the past year (2006-2007). Around 20,000 were hospitalized, and about 40,000 received ambulatory services of all sorts. Approximately 5,000 patients from the Gaza area have been treated in Israeli hospitals over the past year – about 2,000 hospitalized and about 3,000 receiving ambulatory services of all sorts. Among the patients receiving medical care in Israel, approximately 2,500 were children, the majority of whom received long-term treatment for cancer and complicated operations.”

While some criticize Israel for what they term “inhuman” behavior, Israelis are proud of their devotion to the well-being of others. Even when facing animosity from much of the Arab world Israelis follow the example of Moses, and take great care to help the needy and treat the sick. Perhaps if those groups who wish to see Israel destroyed would follow the example of Reuel, and repay kindness with kindness, we would see a new era of mutual cooperation. ■

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