

FEBRUARY 1, 2010

Parashat Yitro

The Obvious Truth

Vayishma Yitro – “And Jethro heard” (Exodus 18:1)

Why did Jethro abandon his family and homeland to seek out Moses in the middle of the desert? The Midrash offers three possible explanations, including the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer who states that Jethro left his home because he had heard about “the war with Amalek.” Why would the war with Amalek cause Jethro to seek out Moses? The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 27) explains, based on the proximity of this verse to the previous story of the battle with Amalek (17:8-16), that “Amalek and Jethro were [partners] together with the Pharaoh. When Jethro saw that God had destroyed Amalek...he questioned himself and repented.” Upon learning Amalek’s fate, Jethro reassessed the value of associating with Amalek and sought to align himself with Moses instead.

Following the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites, Jethro recognized that he was jeopardizing his livelihood by allying himself with Amalek. Nowadays, an increasing number of companies that have previously done business with Iran are coming to understand Jethro’s reasoning.

Companies that do business with Iran have begun reading the writing on the wall and some are deciding to cease operations with the Islamic Republic. In fact, *Reuters* recently reported that the “German engineering conglomerate Siemens [said that]...it would reject any further orders from Iran as world powers consider imposing wider sanctions on Tehran over its nuclear activity.” Siemens, whose business ties with Tehran date back to 1974, generates \$704.5 million in annual sales to Iran. *The Jerusalem Post* reports that the company decided to pull out of Iran after “Stop the Bomb, a pro-Israel NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] in Austria and Germany, mounted a sophisticated yearlong pressure campaign to force Siemens to shut down its Iran operation.” Stop the Bomb campaigned by criticizing Siemens’ for selling Iran equipment that allows it to spy on the online activities and correspondence of its internet users, accusing the company of being complicit in human rights abuses during last summer’s post-election riots. Further, Stop the Bomb shamed Siemens by confronting their board of directors with charges of ignoring their historical responsibility toward the Jewish state—a special obligation stemming from Siemens’ use of Jewish slave labor during the Holocaust.

Through its bold actions, Stop the Bomb helped Siemens to recognize the need to cease business associations with Iran. Like Jethro, Siemens seems to have recognized the obvious truth and changed its ways. Now, we must continue with similar grass-roots campaigns in order to encourage more companies to follow suit. ■

Divine Dichotomy

Asher hotzeiticha mei’eretz Mitzrayim – “who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 20:2)

In the first of the Ten Commandments, the Torah refers to the Almighty as the “God of the Exodus.” Rashi (on 20:2, second explanation) notes that this is a biblical reference to God’s dichotomy. At the Sea of Reeds God displayed the qualities of “a warrior during battle,” using an “outstretched arm” to destroy the attacking Egyptian forces. Conversely, at Sinai, God was revealed “as an elder filled with compassion” (see Exodus 24:10). Therefore, by referring to the Almighty as the “God of the Exodus” the Torah is actually emphasizing that the kindhearted God of Sinai is also the same God that fought to free the Israelites from Egypt.

The Torah's reference to HaShem as the God of the Exodus teaches us about the dichotomy which enables the Almighty to act appropriately in varying situations. Nowadays, the state of Israel demonstrates a similar dichotomy. Like the description of God at the Sea of Reeds, Israel stands ready to act as "a warrior during battle" to defend its citizens. However, like God at Sinai, the Jewish state also consistently engages its fellow nations "as an elder filled with compassion."

Many people think of Israel and conjure images of soldiers and warfare. While it is true that the Jewish state has often been forced to take the posture of a "warrior during battle," Israel's recent actions in Haiti underscore Jerusalem's efforts to act "as an elder filled with compassion." In the wake of last month's devastating earthquake, Israel sent an expert team to help in the rescue and treatment of Haitians affected by the natural disaster. The team opened the first fully functioning field hospital in the ravaged country, allowing doctors to perform surgery and other advanced procedures. Israel's humanitarian efforts can be summed up by Matt Goldstein, the commander of ZAKA, an Israeli emergency response service composed of religiously observant Jews. "With all the hell going on outside ... Judaism says we must take a deep breath and go on to save more people... We did everything to save lives, despite Shabbat. People asked, 'Why are you here? There are no Jews here', but we are here because the Torah orders us to save lives... We are desecrating Shabbat with pride." For more on Israel's humanitarian efforts in Haiti, click [here](#).

The dichotomy which the Torah uses to describe God's actions can also be ascribed to Israel. While many instantly think of the Jewish state as a military power, we must publicize Israel's benevolent actions so that others will come to understand the true nature of the Jewish state. Despite the fact that Israel will act as a "warrior" when necessary, it much prefers to be "an elder" that helps those in need. ■

Murder, Intended or Not

Lo Tirtzach – "You shall not commit murder" (Exodus 20:12)

With the severity of murder being obvious, and the commandment to bring a murderer to justice found in other places throughout the Torah, why is the prohibition against murder included in the Ten Commandments? Commenting on this commandment, Chizkuni states that the prohibition on murder includes anyone complicit in the crime. "Whether by hand, whether through the tongue, and whether through silence. For instance, if one learns the secret of a [future] murder and does not reveal the secret." According to Chizkuni, the Torah considers anyone associated with a murder spiritually and ethically culpable, even in cases where the legal system cannot prosecute. Therefore, the Torah includes the prohibition on murder in the Ten Commandments to clearly state that anyone who is complicit in causing the death of another person is also considered to be a murderer, even if that person escapes punishment in this world.

Chizkuni's explanation of the broader definition of murder teaches us about the severity of the deed and the imperative to not allow murderers to escape responsibility for their actions. We must keep this lesson in mind as we consider new claims being made by Hamas.

In an attempt to deflect blame for the tragic destruction and loss of life during Operation Cast Lead, Hamas recently claimed that "three Israeli civilians killed in rocket attacks by its members during Israel's Gaza offensive last year were hit by mistake." Human Rights Watch immediately rejected Hamas' claim that the terrorist group did not target civilians during Operation Cast Lead, *Agence France Press* reports. According to Human Rights Watch, "Hamas' claim that rockets were intended to hit Israeli military targets and only accidentally harmed civilians is belied by the facts." Human Rights Watch also notes that "deliberately targeting civilians is a war crime" and the organization rejects Hamas' claims that attacks against Israeli civilians were justified reprisals. For more on Hamas, click [here](#).

In denying its murderous intent Hamas ignores the simple truth of its own actions. Moreover, the terrorist organization denies another equally important truth: initiating unprovoked attacks against innocent people violates every aspect of the most basic and universal commandment—*lo tirtzach*. ■