

APRIL 11, 2011

Parashat Achrei Mot & Passover

Critical Context

After the death of the two sons of Aaron (Leviticus 16:1)

אחרי מות שני בני אהרן (ויקרא טז:א)

Why does the Torah mention the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, which were already recorded in the bible (see Leviticus 10:1-2), when describing the Yom Kippur service in the Tabernacle? Rashi (on 16:1) explains that their fate is recalled to remind Moses about their improper behavior during the priestly service: “Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah would tell a parable of a sick man who visited a doctor that told him, ‘Don’t eat cold food, nor sleep in a damp place.’ Another doctor came and said to him, ‘Don’t eat anything cold nor sleep in a cold space, lest you die as so-and-so did.’ The latter urged him more than the former.” As such, recalling the deaths of Nadab and Abihu was intended to serve as a more powerful warning to follow the proper protocol of the Yom Kippur service.

While the mentioning of Aaron’s sons in our *parashah* may seem odd, when we understand the context we can appreciate the Torah’s true intention. Nowadays, understanding contexts remains as important as ever. As the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) moves to take action against Israel based on the findings of the Goldstone Report, the author’s recent retraction, as well as a separate report from a Palestinian rights group, puts Israel’s actions in Gaza in their proper context.

In a [Washington Post](#) op-ed, Justice Richard Goldstone acknowledged serious errors and factual inaccuracies in the U.N. commissioned report bearing his name. Goldstone went further to say that “the allegations of intentionality [of killing civilians] by Israel were based on no evidence.” Conversely, he stated plainly that Hamas “rockets were purposefully and indiscriminately aimed at civilian targets.” In his original report, Goldstone overlooked the basic fact that Israel faces an adversary that intentionally places civilians in harm’s way to gain a military and political advantage. This fact has now come into greater focus with the recent condemnation of Hamas by a Palestinian human rights group. [The New York Times](#) reported that the Palestinian Center for Human Rights in Gaza “took the unusual step...of condemning the building and storage of anti-Israel rockets in densely populated areas, a practice that has led to injuries and deaths of civilians. The Palestinian Center for Human Rights said that locally produced projectiles had fallen on homes in Gaza or exploded in factories where they were made or stored.” Israel has long provided visual evidence of Hamas’ use of human shields and storage of weapons in civilian areas. For more on Justice Goldstone’s retraction of the Goldstone Report, click [here](#). For more on Hamas, click [here](#).

Like the Torah’s mention of Aaron’s sons, when we consider the Goldstone Report’s findings—and Hamas’ terrorist tactics—in their proper context, the intention becomes clear. Now, the United States should press the United Nations to nullify the Goldstone Report and take no further action as a result of its inaccurate findings. ■

Tradition for All

Let all those in need come and make Pesach (Passover Haggadah)

כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח (הגדה של פסח)

Helping those in need celebrate Passover has long been an integral part of Jewish tradition. Indeed, it is customary to donate each year to special *ma’ot chitin*, funds for the poor to help offset the additional expenses of the holiday. We

explicitly express this generosity as we sit down to the seder. In the opening paragraph of *ha lachma anya*, we recall the “bread of poverty” that the Jewish nation ate throughout the ordeal of slavery in Egypt, and invite the poor to join us by saying: “Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat; whoever is in need, let him come and celebrate the Passover festival.” In remembrance of our hunger in Egypt, we offer to share our wealth with those in need.

Caring and giving to others are core values that underlie the celebration of Passover. In this spirit, a unique Israel Defense Forces delegation is helping bring relief to the Jews in Japan who have seen their homes, and any hope for carrying out their Passover traditions this year, decimated.

Tzvi Yehuda Mansbach, a lieutenant in the Israel Defense Forces rabbinical corps, is just the man to bring that hope back to life. Mansbach recently arrived in Minamisanriku, Japan with 60 members of an IDF aid delegation, and has been tending to the spiritual needs of the delegation members as well as the local community. According to [Yediot Achronot](#), Mansbach also brought “seder kits” for each soldier, and extra kits for “Tokyo’s Jewish community, who will most likely find it hard to provide themselves with matzos, wine and Passover Haggadahs for the holiday.” As these soldiers help the local Jewish community celebrate Passover, they are also following in the Jewish tradition of supporting the less fortunate. In fact, the [aid delegation](#) “includes 50 doctors and brought with it 62 tons of medical equipment and 18 tons of humanitarian aid, including some 10,000 coats, 6,000 blankets, 8,000 gloves and 150 portable toilets.”

Each year as we begin our seder, we symbolically invite the disadvantaged, promising to provide them with their Passover needs. This year, the IDF took that promise to heart, taking incredible steps to ensure that the Jews of Japan would be able to maintain tradition, and supporting the needy victims of the recent natural disasters. ■

Modern Persecution

In every generation (Passover Haggadah)

שבכל דוד ודור (הגדה של פסח)

During the seder, before the actual retelling of the story of the Exodus, we remind ourselves that “In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us.” In his commentary to the Haggadah, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik connects the relevance of this phrase to our modern lives, stating that the night of the seder represents not just a ceremony of remembrance, but a ceremony of experience: “We inform the listener that our method is one...of translating the past into the present, of identifying memory with reality. The *parashah* tells us that we are a lonely people, that we are all a band of wandering Arameans facing hostility” (The Seder Night: An Exalted Evening p. 58).

On the night of the seder, as we stress the connection between past hostility towards the Jewish people with present threats, we must look at our world and take note of the continuing movement to undermine Israel’s legitimacy.

In a recent address, House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer decried the ongoing efforts to delegitimize Israel and spread anti-Semitism throughout much of the Arab world, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. “If this is a new era of openness in the Middle East, then the work of defending Israel from ideological attacks becomes even more pressing,” Hoyer said. “That’s because, if this is a new era of openness, it matters more than ever that the Arab people have a view of Israel unclouded by bigotry.” This would not be easy work, due to “the lingering effect of generations of anti-Semitic propaganda and incitement of hatred.” Rep. Steve Chabot (R-OH), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Middle East subcommittee, echoed Hoyer’s sentiments, emphasizing the continued efforts to undermine Israel in the halls of the United Nations: “When it comes to the delegitimization of Israel, one need look no further than New York, [to] the United Nations,” he said. “The discredited UN Human Rights Council is at the heart of [the] anti-Israel movement.”

The authors of the Haggadah remind us that the Passover story never really ended, and that the tragic saga of anti-Semitism merely began in Egypt. Sadly, one need only read the news to see just how right they were. ■

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