

FEBRUARY 6, 2012

Parashat Yitro

Guilt by Association

And Jethro heard (Exodus 18:1)

וישמע יתרו (שמות יח:א)

The Talmud (Sotah 11a) relates that before Jethro was the Priest of Midian he served along with two other famous biblical figures, Balaam and Job, as a royal advisor to the wicked Pharaoh in Egypt. When the king consulted his advisors seeking counsel to deal with the Israelites, Balaam suggested enslaving the Jews, Job remained silent, and Jethro fled—understanding that if he remained connected to the king, he too would be held responsible for the evil actions that Egypt was about to commit. The Talmud states that, “Balaam who offered the advice [was eventually] killed; Job who remained silent was sentenced to suffering; Jethro who fled merited to have descendants who sat [in the Sanhedrin].”

From the Talmud we learn that it was Balaam’s support for Pharaoh that led to his eventual death. Today, it is Iran’s support for the Assad regime that may lead the Islamic Republic to suffer negative consequences of its own.

In recent written testimony submitted to the Senate Intelligence Committee, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper wrote that “Iran has sought to ‘exploit the Arab Spring but has reaped limited benefits, thus far,’ as Tehran’s biggest regional concern is ally Syria, where a change in leadership would be a major strategic loss for Iran,” [Reuters](#) reported. In fact, Iran’s long association with Syria is now increasingly seen as a major source of weakness for the Islamic Republic. According to [The New York Times](#), “The departure of Mr. Assad, the thinking goes, not only would threaten to sever Syria from Iran, which has long been a goal of the United States and its Arab allies, but also could deprive Iran of its main means of projecting power in the Middle East.” Iran has long channeled arms and finances to terrorist groups like Hizballah and Hamas through Syria. According to Andrew J. Tabler, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and an expert on Syria, Assad’s demise “would be the biggest blow to Iran’s influence in the region in decades.” For more on Syria, click [here](#). For more on Iran, click [here](#).

Balaam’s support of Pharaoh’s evil actions ultimately cost him his life. Similarly, Iran is now paying the price for its association with Assad, who should heed the will of the international community and give up power. ■

Critical Support

And Jethro came (Exodus 18:5)

ויבא יתרו (שמות יח:ה)

Commentators note the connection of the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17:8-16) and Jethro’s visit to the Jewish nation camped in the desert. While some suggest that the two events actually occurred in succession chronologically, others suggest that the Torah links them to demonstrate the value of supporting an ally. Rabbi Pinchas Peli (see *Shivim Panim L’Torah*, volume 2, page 87) explained that Jethro’s visit “carried great import specifically at that time, for he contradicted the claim among many in Israel who said that ‘the world is against us.’” According to this view, Jethro merited eternal acclaim because he offered the Jewish nation critical support at a time when they needed it most.

Like Jethro, who offered support to the Israelites when they felt that the world was against them, the United States continues to stand by Israel's side at the United Nations.

While the United Nations played a crucial role in the creation of Israel, U.N. history has been marked by persistent antagonism toward the Jewish state. In fact, the U.N. has passed more resolutions aimed at isolating Israel than resolutions condemning genocide, warfare, and human rights violations throughout the world, and has consistently employed a double standard in its treatment of Israel, directing false allegations against the country while ignoring acts of genocide and other massive human rights violations committed by other countries. The Palestinians, Arab states and their supporters have used the world forum to question Israel's legitimacy and to isolate it politically, from the 1975 "Zionism is Racism" resolution to the more recent conferences on racism that have devolved into focused attacks on the Jewish state. Thankfully, time after time the United States has taken action in the U.N. to support Israel, vetoing resolutions slanted against Israel. Since 1983, the United States has vetoed over 25 U.N. Security Council Resolutions that it considered biased against the Jewish state. For more on Israel and the U.N., click [here](#).

Like Jethro's visit, which offered encouragement and support at a critical time, the United States has consistently stood by Israel. Even when it seems like the world is against it, the Jewish State can always count on its trusted friend, supporter and ally. ■

Killing with Words

You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13)

לֹא תרצח (שמות כ:יג)

While the prohibition against committing murder seems self-explanatory, the Midrash (Pesikta Chadeta) expands the ban to include other activity associated with murder. "Why is the prohibition 'You shall not murder' conveyed in a word with four letters [*tirtzach*]? To teach you that you may partner with murderers neither with your hand, nor your foot, nor your mouth, nor your attitude." Expanding on the concept of "verbal murder," Jewish tradition draws a direct line between speech and the havoc it can wreak. Rambam writes (Laws of Attitudes, 7:4) that "Our sages taught, evil speech kills three people: He who speaks it, he who accepts it, and he who is spoken about." As such, words have the power to literally kill, and for this reason, Judaism explicitly prohibits speech that can lead to loss of life.

While the Torah forbids speaking in a manner that might lead to murder, sadly, the Palestinian Authority (PA) continues to provide platforms that actively promote the taking of life.

Twice in January official PA television aired greetings to the murderers of the Fogel family from the relatives of the killers and from the PA television host, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. As you may recall, last March five members of the Fogel family were killed in the West Bank settlement of Itamar by Palestinian terrorists from the Awad family. Hakim Awad led the attack, killing Ehud and Ruth Fogel and three of their children, aged eleven, four, and two months. Awad's mother blessed her "dear son" on the program, and despite the fact that participants in this program normally do not mention the terror attacks for which their relatives are serving time, the mother mentioned that her son is the one who "carried out the operation in Itamar and sentenced to five life sentences." On a separate occasion, the PA television host added: "We, for our part, also convey our greetings to them." Immediately following the murders last year, "Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Salam Fayyad announced that he 'clearly and firmly' condemned the terror attack in Itamar," [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported, saying that, "We oppose violence and condemn its use." Yet, by providing a platform that lauds these heinous murders less than a year later, the PA is actually actively encouraging others to try and emulate Awad's acts against other innocent Israelis.

At Sinai, God affirmed the value of life by forbidding not only the act of murder itself, but any actions or words that could lead to murder as well. Today, instead of affirming the value of all life and condemning incitement to murder, the PA seems intent on extolling and encouraging terrible acts of violence. ■