

NOVEMBER 3, 2014

Parashat Vayera

The Cries of the Oppressed

The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20)

זעקת סדום ועמורה (בראשית יח:כ)

Before the punishment of the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is finalized, Abraham was both informed and encouraged to negotiate to save the city. In describing the wickedness of the cities God told Abraham, “the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sin is exceedingly grievous.” (18:20) What were these “cries” of two large cities? Ramban (on verse 20) explains that this refers “to the cries of the oppressed; they call out and must be saved from the strong arm of their oppressors.” Ramban notes that their cries invoked the divine attribute of justice, which immediately judged the actions of the sinful cities and responded with swift justice.

The cries of the oppressed victims in Sodom and Gomorrah invited swift justice upon the cities. Today, the world must hear the cries of the victims of an oppressive Iranian regime that denies its citizens basic human rights.

The execution in Iran last week of 26-year-old Reyhaneh Jabbari, convicted of murdering a man she accused of trying to rape her as a teenager highlighted, according to [Reuters](#), a “surge in executions in the country over the past 12-15 months”—roughly corresponding to the time Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has been in office. The U.N. special rapporteur on Iran, Ahmed Shaheed noted that, “At least 852 individuals were executed in the period since June of last year, including eight juveniles.” He also noted “a widening of the range of offenses for which people are being put to death, including economic crimes as well as in some cases, clear political activities.” The [New York Times](#) reported that Shaheed’s report also emphasized worsening conditions for Iranian women. “Girls as young as 9 can be married, so long as a court gives its blessings. ‘Nonconsensual sexual relations in marriage’ are allowed under the law. A woman trying to leave an abusive marriage must prove ‘a significant risk of bodily harm,’ while a woman seeking a divorce on the grounds of domestic violence must prove that the violence is ‘intolerable.’” Quotas that limit women’s higher education have sharply reduced the percentage of female students entering university while other laws restrict the ability of unmarried women to work. Troublingly, liberals in Iran believe that their government helped set the stage for [a spate of acid attacks against women](#) deemed dressed immodestly when it enacted a parliamentary measure providing protection to citizens who act on their own to help enforce the country’s strict social mores.

Just as God heard the cries from the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, we too must hear their cries and demand that the Islamic regime curb its human rights abuses and halt the sickening executions which are so common in the Islamic regime. ■

For the Sake of Peace

My husband is old (Genesis 18:12)

ואדני זקן (בראשית יח:יב)

After hearing the prophetic promise, from the mysterious visitors, that she would soon bear a child, Sarah silently laughs inwardly saying, “After I have withered shall I again have delicate skin? And my husband is old!” (verse 12) Yet, when God recounts Sarah’s reaction to the news to Abraham, instead of referring to his age, God inaccurately relates that she said, “Shall I in truth bear a child though I have aged.” (verse 13) The Talmud (Yevamot 55b), noting

the switch, explains that God changed the story in order to maintain peace within Abraham's home. "So great is peace that even the Holy One altered [the truth] for the sake of peace."

In altering the truth in order to maintain peace, God taught humanity that peace requires willingness to compromise and a readiness to change. While Israel has accepted this fact, the Palestinians have demonstrated the opposite.

Genuine peace between Israelis and Palestinians will require both sides to make difficult compromises. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has explicitly embraced this basic truth and in turn has taken concrete steps to advance Israel's goal of a negotiated peace with the Palestinians. Israel has quietly [lifted the ban](#) on construction materials to Gaza in order to ease the burden on the devastated Gazan population. Despite these efforts, the Palestinian Authority leadership, rather than making changes that could lead to peace, has maintained its campaign of hatred and incitement against the Jewish state. After Abdel Rahman Al-Shaludi intentionally drove his car into a crowd of pedestrians at a light rail train station in Jerusalem, Fatah, the controlling party of the Palestinian Authority, [published a poster](#) honoring the terrorist, proclaiming that "The Silwan branch of Fatah honors the heroic martyr Abdel Rahman Al-Shaludi, who executed the Jerusalem operation which led to the running over of settlers in the occupied city of Jerusalem." This act of terrorism killed three-month-old Chaya Zissel Braun, as well as a 22-year-old Karen Yemima Mosquera, an Ecuadorian student living in Israel who was in the process of converting to Judaism.

Peace requires compromise and a readiness to alter our own truths to accept the truth of another. After so many years of conflict, the Palestinian Authority still seems unable to alter its position and accept the truth of the Jewish state. ■

A Powerful Partnership

And Abraham said to Sarah, his wife (Genesis 20:2)

ויאמר אברהם אל שרה אשתו (בראשית כ:ב)

The marriage of Abraham and Sarah represented a powerful partnership that literally changed history, as they worked hand-in-hand to bring the message of monotheism to the world. "Abraham converted the men, Sarah the women." (see Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 37) Facing danger in both in Egypt (chapter 12) and in Gerar (chapter 20), she risks her life pretending to be his sister in order to protect him. When Sarah demands that Abraham send Ishmael away, Abraham defers to her demands, despite his misgivings. Dr. Ruth Wolf writes that, "In their relationship we see the ability to lean on one another and give support, and most of all, great consideration one for the other." Throughout their lives, Abraham and Sarah demonstrated the biblical ideal of a true partnership.

The partnership between Abraham and Sarah combined their strengths to bring blessing to the world. The partnership between the United States and Israel continues to benefit both nations, making the world safer and more secure.

When Business Insider magazine [rated Israel as the strongest military in the Middle East](#), it explained that, "A close defense relationship with the U.S. and an energetic domestic defense industry gives Israel a qualitative edge over all of the region's other militaries." Late last month, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon, visiting the United States, placed [a preliminary order](#) for about 25 of Lockheed Martin's F-35 stealth fighter jets, bringing its total order to about 44, Israeli defense and U.S. sources said. Israel bought 19 F-35s for \$2.75 billion in 2010, a deal which included options for up to 75 planes. According to the [Jerusalem Post](#), "the F-35 will ensure Israel's regional qualitative edge in the first quarter of the 21st century, a period that will be fraught with a variety of developing security threats, defense chiefs have said." America's investment in Israel's qualitative military advantage gives the United States a powerful ally in the one of the most volatile regions in the world. In addition, in the 40 years since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, U.S. support for Israel through annual security aid has helped deter conflict by making it clear to potential foes that they cannot defeat the Jewish state. For decades, Israel, serving as America's trusted ally, had been an anchor of stability in the region and helped thwart aggressors.

When America joins forces with Israel to combat terrorist and face down radical, violent regimes, that teamwork brings greater global stability. Like Abraham and Sarah, the two countries form a powerful, potent partnership. ■

Sermon tidbits are intended for your use without attribution. Please feel free to use some or all of the material. Although it is not necessary, it is appreciated if copies of sermons or articles that use the ideas presented here are sent to synagogue@aipac.org.