

AUGUST 17, 2015

## Parashat Shoftim

### A Regime of Hatred

**But if any man hates his neighbor (Deuteronomy 19:11)**

**וכי יהיה איש שונא לרעהו (דברים יט:יא)**

In 2009, immediately after President Obama delivered his famous Cairo Address, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [dismissed Obama's "beautiful speech"](#) insisting that powerful rhetoric "could not remove the hatred felt in the Muslim world against America." Khamenei stated, "People of the Middle East, the Muslim region and North Africa—people of these regions—hate America from the bottom of their heart." In the same speech, he also denounced Israel as a 'cancerous tumor in the heart of the Islamic world.' Hatred, and expressions of hatred, matter a great deal, as hate exposes and defines an individual's—and a country's—ideals and motives. We find an explicit application of this idea in the commandments related to the cities of refuge described in Parshat Shoftim.

Several times in the Torah, Moses relates the commandment to set aside cities of refuge which would offer protection to those who kill accidentally. While an individual who committed intentional murder was subject to retribution on the part of a *go'el hadam* (literally a "blood avenger"), one who killed accidentally could flee to a city of refuge, which offered the accidental killer protection and safety from a vengeful relative. Often though, even an intentional killing could be made to look like an accident. How could society distinguish between an intentional murder and a genuine accident?

Moses explains that we must examine the relationship prior to the act. "And this is the case of the manslayer who shall flee there and live: whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, *and hated him not in time past.*" (19:4) Moses states this rule a second time, noting that the city of refuge would not protect a person who, "hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rise[s] up against him..." (see verse 11) The Midrash (Midrash Taim Devarim 19) explains: "What is considered [a relationship] of hatred? [This refers to] anyone who did not speak with his fellow man for three days out of enmity." We must interpret a person's actions based upon his past behavior. If someone perpetrates a violent act against someone he is known to hate, we can only assume that he acted intentionally, with malice. The Sages also noted the danger that hatred itself poses: "The Rabbi taught: Anyone who hates his fellow man—it is as if he killed him. As it is written, 'If any man hates his neighbor and lies in wait for him and rise[s] up against him...' [From this verse we learn that] if [someone who harbors hatred] is given the opportunity, he would kill [his fellow man]." (See Kallah Rabati 8:1)

As members of the House and Senate weigh whether to support the nuclear agreement with Iran, we must take into account Iran's past hateful actions, attitude and statements towards the United States, as well as towards Israel, America's strongest ally. The sentiments expressed by Iran's Supreme Leader in 2009 have not changed, as he expressed similar sentiments after Iran signed the agreement with the P5+1 nations this year. On July 10<sup>th</sup> Khamenei told an Iranian audience, "Death to Israel, Death to the U.S." The next day Khamenei said that, "Fighting global arrogance is the core of our revolution and we cannot put it on hold. Get ready to continue your fight against the global arrogance...the U.S. is the true embodiment of the global arrogance." When asked about the chants of "Death to America", [U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry](#) called them, "Very disturbing...very troubling."

Yet, Iran's hatred of America can be considered mild in contrast to its virulent antipathy to Israel. Last November, Khamenei [Tweeted that](#), "This barbaric, wolflike, and infanticidal regime of Israel which spares no crime has no cure

but to be annihilated.” This is just one of the long lists of vulgar threats that the Islamic regime has made against Israel over the past decades. In a [recent interview](#) with Jeffrey Goldberg in *The Atlantic*, President Obama echoed the Sages in the Midrash, admitting that, “I take what the supreme leader says seriously. I think his ideology is steeped with anti-Semitism, and if he could, without catastrophic costs, inflict great harm on Israel, I’m confident that he would.” Iran’s hatred for both the United States and Israel is well-known. For this reason, we must reject an agreement that paves the way for Iran to achieve nuclear weapons, giving a regime of hatred the means to translate its hatred into reality. ■

## An Ancient Source for Democracy

**You shall set a king over you (Deuteronomy 17:14)**

**שׁוֹם תְּשִׁים עֲלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ (דְּבָרִים יז:יד)**

At the end of the month, the Knesset will inaugurate a year-long celebration marking the fiftieth year of the iconic building, the seat of Israeli democracy, the [Jerusalem Post](#) reported. According to the Post, “The 50<sup>th</sup> year since the Knesset building was constructed begins on August 30, and the Knesset has a long series of events planned to mark the event, which guests from around the world are expected to attend.” Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein noted that, “More than ever, the values of democracy that the Knesset represents are significant to Israeli society,” and added that as democracy will be the theme of the celebrations, the events will bring positive attention to the legislature and its importance to the public. Still, the roots of Jewish democracy did not begin with the Knesset. These roots run far deeper, beginning in our parashah with the mitzvah to appoint a Jewish king.

While a Jewish monarchy might, at first glance, seem to be the exact opposite of the ideal of democracy (just ask America’s founding fathers), the text of commandment as it appears in the Torah, reveals a far more nuanced approach to Jewish government. The commandment itself seems self-contradictory: “When you come to the land which the Lord your God gives you and possess it and dwell therein and shall say: ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me;’ you shall set a king over you...” (17:13-14) Moses does not relay an absolute commandment to appoint a king. Rather, the decision remains the choice of the people. Netziv, in his *Ha’amek Davar* commentary on the Torah, explains that the Torah does not require a Jewish monarchy because the government must match the needs of the nation during different periods throughout history. He writes (on verse 14) “It seems that the leadership of the State changes [over time], whether it functions by the rule of a monarchy, or by the rule of the nation and their elected representatives; for some States cannot suffer the rule of a monarch, while others without a king are like a ship without a captain...” According to Netziv, the Torah commanded us to choose the form of government most appropriate to the needs of society—including a democratic leadership elected by the people.

This biblical imperative to choose a leader formed the roots of the democratic ideal that has guided both the United States and Israel, and has served as a common, shared value which has bonded the two countries together to promote freedom and democracy around the world. America cherishes Israel’s liberal democratic tradition rooted in liberty, its rule of law, free and fair elections and full voting rights for all its citizens. The U.S. also celebrates and supports Israel’s guarantee of “complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex.” We must encourage Congress to continue its historic role as the world’s leading defender of Israel’s right to exist and the legitimacy of its presence in the Holy Land. We must oppose cynical attempts to boycott, divest from or sanction Israel, and champion efforts to enhance Israel’s position in the international arena by demanding equal opportunities and treatment in key international and multilateral organizations. Finally, we must point out the double standard of authoritarian governments that falsely attack Israel for allegedly violating rights they deny their own citizens.

Over the coming year, as we join with Israel and celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Knesset building, we must recommit ourselves to our work here in America that insures that the democratic ideals, rooted in Jewish values, continues to flourish and thrive in the modern state of Israel. ■

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