

NOVEMBER 9, 2015

Parashat Toldot

A Culture of Hatred and Death

Behold, I am at the point to die (Genesis 25:32)

הנה אנכי הולך למות (בראשית כה:לב)

On October 12th, Ahmed Mansara, 13, together with his cousin Hassan, 15, stabbed and seriously wounded two Israelis—including a 13-year-old in the Pisgat Ze'ev neighborhood of Jerusalem. According to the police indictment charging Mansara with attempted murder, Ahmed and Hassan discussed events at Al-Aqsa and [wanting to become martyrs](#) “and to be killed in the religious by stabbing Jews.” Why would two teens—ages 13 and 15—want to die in an act of martyrdom? According to Israeli authorities, they, along with tens of thousands of Palestinian youth, have been inundated in a culture of hatred and martyrdom. Bombarded with messages glorifying murder and violence, these youths are making the foolish and all too often deadly choice to kill innocent civilians.

Esau suffered from the same twisted perspective focused on death. When an exhausted Esau returned one day from the hunting fields, he found Jacob cooking a pot of lentil soup and asks for a bowl. After Jacob requested Esau's birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup, Esau said to himself, “Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall the birthright do to me?” (Genesis 25:32) What is the meaning of Esau's strange comment? Was he really at the point of death? Some commentators (See S'forno on verse 32) suggest that Esau felt he truly *was* starving to death, so he sold the birthright for desperately needed life-saving soup. Others (see Rashbam) see Esau's comment in more abstract terms: Esau the hunter spent his days tracking wild and dangerous animals, which would eventually kill him. Hence, he felt that as the birthright would only benefit him many years in the future, it was of little value to him. Dr. Adina Zornberg (see “The Beginning of Desire, p. 160) offers a deeper, more fundamental explanation of Esau's compulsive action. She suggests that following the death of Abraham, Esau was consumed with his own mortality. “Esau, who is ‘going’ toward death, whose mortality obsesses him, is the true object of compassion...his life is filled with the imminence of death, and all cultural forms and privileges lose substance under that shadow.”

Like Esau, too many Palestinian youths similarly make foolish, compulsive decisions. In their case, to engage in suicidal acts of terror after having been inundated and inculcated into a culture of hatred, murder and death. During a recent Knesset Education, Culture and Sport Committee meeting on incitement in Palestinian schools and media, [Israeli lawmakers learned how](#) “in formal and informal educational frameworks, killers of Israelis are portrayed as heroes and role models, and that children are taught that Israel will eventually be replaced by ‘Palestine.’...At least 25 Palestinian Authority schools are named after terrorists...” Last month, a West Bank town [named a street after a terrorist](#) who murdered two Israelis in Jerusalem. Moreover, extremist Palestinians are utilizing social media's expansive reach to bolster their call for violence against Israelis, sharing ghoulish cartoons extolling and advocating the murder of Jews, instructional videos explaining the most effective way to stab civilians, as well as graphics praising terrorists.

Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives [passed a resolution](#) condemning the recent wave of terrorist attacks and urging Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and other PA officials to stop all incitement, repudiate attacks against Israelis, and continue important security cooperation with Israel. The resolution further directs the State Department to regularly monitor and publish information on all official incitement by the Palestinian Authority against Jews and the state of Israel. The United States must follow up on this important resolution by continuing to

urge Palestinian leaders to do their utmost to quell this incitement. PA President Mahmoud Abbas must end incitement to violence, condemn the recent wave of attacks, and resume direct peace negotiations with Israel. ■

A Critical Treaty

And Isaac went to Abimelech (Genesis 26:2)

וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ (בְּרֵאשִׁית כו:ב)

After weeks of blatant lies created a tempest of violence surrounding the status of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Israel was finally able to clarify its ongoing commitment to maintain the status-quo by working together with Jordan to calm tensions, reduce rhetoric, and finally decrease violence in Jerusalem related to the Temple Mount. According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), “Israel and Jordan...agreed to take a range of public and technical steps to clarify the guidelines for jointly managing holy sites in Jerusalem...according to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and his Jordanian counterpart, Nasser Judeh... Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would continue to work alongside Jordanian authorities to ensure visitors and worshipers could safely access the site.” Israel’s ongoing cooperation with Jordan, following the peace treaty over twenty years ago, serves as a model for peace and coexistence in the fragile Middle East. It also closely follows a similar model established by Abraham and reinforced years later by Isaac, his son.

With the outbreak of a devastating famine, Isaac abandoned the barren Land of Canaan and traveled to the Philistine land of Gerar. Forbidden to travel further south to Egypt, he settled temporarily in Gerar to ride out the famine. There, his wife Rebecca was taken to the local warlord, King Abimelech, who only returned her when God intervened on Isaac’s behalf. Ramban wonders: why did Isaac specifically seek haven in Gerar under the control of Abimelech? He explains that Isaac chose Abimelech specifically because of the peace covenant his father had established with the Philistine ruler. Ramban writes, (on verse 2) “[Isaac] went to Abimelech who had established a covenant with his father—perhaps [Abimelech] would find favor with him during the days of the famine, and he would not need to travel to Egypt. In fact, Abimelech harmed neither him nor his household at all, but the people of the region inquired about his wife...nonetheless, neither the king nor any of his men touched her for they remembered the matter of Abraham.” Years earlier, Abraham established a covenant of peace with Abimelech, the Philistine king. (Genesis 21:22-34) Now, when his son was in danger, that treaty protected Isaac from peril.

Today, Israel finds itself in precisely the same situation, as its peace treaty with Jordan serves as an anchor of stability in the most volatile region of the world. In the 1994 agreement, Jordan and Israel settled border and water disputes, promised broad cooperation in trade and tourism, and pledged that neither would allow its territory to be used as a staging area for a third country to launch military strikes against the other. The accord also opened the door for unprecedented U.S. economic and military assistance to Jordan which allowed Jordan to reinforce its position as a pro-Western country and a strategic U.S. ally. Today, both countries continue to benefit from what King Hussein in 1994 called “Peace with dignity...peace with commitment.” They are now working on a pipeline that will carry water from the Red Sea to replenish the dwindling Dead Sea, and bring badly needed freshwater to both nations. Israel agreed to supply Jordan \$500 million in natural gas over 15 years, a figure that could grow to as much as \$15 billion. In addition, the countries have enjoyed military cooperation as well as the joint effort to maintain calm and preserve the status-quo on the Temple Mount.

The United States has always served as an active partner in maintaining and strengthening the relationship between Israel and Jordan. We must continue to work to ensure that the U.S. maintains its strong support for the treaty and both Israel and Jordan as they address shared security threats, promote regional stability, pursue greater economic and political cooperation, and work for enduring peace. ■

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