



# Sermon Tidbits

APRIL 11, 2016

## Parashat Metzora – Shabbat Hagadol

### Selfish, Self-Serving Leadership – Shabbat Hagadol

On the tenth day of this month (Exodus 12:3)

בעשר לחדש הזה (שמות יב:ג)

Golda Meir famously said, “We will only have peace with the Arabs when they love their children more than they hate us.” Over the last six months, we have witnessed the truth of Meir’s statement, for Palestinian leaders have used official media channels to extol and encourage violence against innocent Israelis. They do this with full knowledge that they are sending their children to their deaths. Sickeningly, the welfare and lives of Palestinian children seem less important to some parts of the Palestinian leadership than the value of attacking and killing Israelis. This should not surprise us. Golda Meir lamented the willingness of Israel’s adversaries’ leaders to place its own needs and interests ahead of the needs, interests and well-being of the people they purportedly represent.

In truth, this is an old story, beginning with the Pharaoh who ruled Egypt during the era of the Exodus. Jewish tradition named the Shabbat that falls before Passover “Shabbat Hagadol”—“The Great Shabbat.” The most common explanation for the naming of this Shabbat relates to the Korban Pesach—the Paschal Lamb slaughtered by the Children of Israel in Egypt. According to the Sages’ calculations, the eve of Passover (which fell on the fourteenth of Nissan) took place on a Wednesday. Therefore, when Moses commanded the people that, “On the tenth day of this month (of Nissan)...each man shall take a lamb for a household, a lamb for each house...” (Exodus 12:3), he instructed them to set aside the lamb on the Shabbat before Passover. The *Ba’alei Tosfot*, in their commentary on Babylonian Talmud Shabbat (87b), writes that in fact, a great miracle took place on that Shabbat when the Jews set aside their Paschal Lambs. “When the Israelites took their Passover offerings on that Shabbat, the first-born of all the nations of the world crowded round the Israelites and asked them what they were doing. They answered, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice for our God who is about to kill the first-born of the Egyptians.’ The [first-borns] went to their leaders and to the Pharaoh to ask him to send the Israelites away, but the Pharaoh would not do so...” The Midrash explains that their first-borns panicked about their impending deaths and waged war against the Egyptians in an attempt to free the Children of Israel. Still, while the designation of the Paschal Lamb sent a clear message to the Egyptians to release the Children of Israel or suffer the consequences, Egypt’s leader remained indifferent. Pharaoh ignored the message and ultimately caused terrible, but unnecessary suffering to the people he was supposed to lead.

Like Pharaoh, the actions of Hamas have similarly placed its desire to harm the Jews over the needs of the citizens of Gaza. When Israel initiated the transfer of cement and other construction material to [facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza](#), many feared that the Hamas leadership would cynically siphon the materials to reconstruct its network of terror tunnels in order to attack, kidnap and kill civilians living within a close proximity to the Gaza border. Sadly, those fears seem to have been realized. According to the Jerusalem Post, Israel [temporarily suspended delivery of cement to Gaza’s private sector](#) after it discovered that Hamas was siphoning the material. The Office of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) suspended the transfer of cement to Gaza because some deliveries had been diverted by Imad Elbaz, the deputy director-general for Hamas’s economics office. “This is a blatant violation of agreements for the rehabilitation mechanism,” COGAT said, adding that it regretted that Hamas continues to pursue its own personal agenda at the expense of Gaza’s residents. The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, issued an unusually sharp response accusing Hamas of theft, saying that “Those who seek to gain through the deviation of materials are stealing from their own people and adding to the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza.”

On Shabbat Hagadol, we remember the cynical indifference of Pharaoh who ignored the security and safety of his own people in order to oppress the Children of Israel. Today, Hamas follows in Pharaoh's footsteps, choosing their hatred and desire to attack Israel over the needs, safety and well-being of the Palestinian people. ■

## The Seder: A Meal of Community and Partnership – Shabbat Hagadol

**Then shall he and his neighbor shall take... (Exodus 12:4)**

**ולקח הוא ושכנו (שמות יב:ד)**

Next Friday evening, Jews around the world will celebrate the evening of Passover by gathering around the Seder table, reading the Hagaddah, and eating too much. Yet, our Sages teach us that while representing an evening of family, camaraderie and gastronomy, the Seder must also be an evening of community—exactly like the very first Seder celebrated by the Children of Israel in Egypt thousands of years ago.

From its very conception, the Paschal Lamb has represented the idea of gathering together to celebrate community, for Moses commanded the people to join together in small groups to share the sacrifice. “And if the household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbor next unto his house take one according to the number of the souls.” (Exodus 12:4) Maimonides writes, “The Paschal sacrifice should be slaughtered only for the sake of those who were enumerated for partaking of it, as the verse states: ‘Everyone... should be enumerated on the lamb.’” (Laws of the Passover Sacrifice 2:1) Noting the communal nature of the Paschal Lamb, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik explains that while slaves only think about themselves and their own needs, free and proud people think of and share with others. He writes, “The birth of the Hesed community—a nation within which people...give things away, care for each other [and] share what they possess—is symbolized by the paschal sacrifice...A new fellowship was formed around the paschal lamb; a new community sprang into existence.” (See “Festival of Freedom” pp 23-24) This explains why we begin the Seder by declaring, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” On Passover, we discover the beauty, power and majesty of shared community. This power began on Shabbat Hagadol—the day that the ancient Israelites “set aside” their lamb for sacrifice. On that day, they were obligated to connect with other families to become a larger group that would share the Seder meal together. On that day, they began the process of transformation from a band of individual slaves into a community of unity, sharing and mutual care.

This notion of sharing and community encourages us to ensure that we transform our Seder into an opportunity for community. Have we reached out to the singles in our community to ensure that they have a place for Seder? Have we ensured that those who may have been overlooked or missed receive an invitation to share in the power of community this Pesach night? It is not too late to ensure now that “everyone who wishes may come and partake.”

The notion of sharing, unity and mutual caring has also served as a hallmark of the relationship between the United States and Israel, both on the ideological and practical level. While our two countries share the values of democracy and freedom and work hard to promote those values around the world, they also join together in numerous practical ways, forming a powerful community dedicated to sharing knowledge and experience to improve one-another. Last week, “U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz and Energy, Infrastructure and [Israeli] Water Resources Minister Yuval Steinitz signed an agreement in Jerusalem...that will strengthen and increase the scope of cooperation between the two countries on issues such as natural gas, oil, water and defense of the networks involved,” the Jerusalem Post [reported](#). Last month, the United States and Israel concluded the biennial [Juniper Cobra exercise](#), which brought 1,700 soldiers from U.S. European Command (EUCOM) to Israel for military drills. This weeks-long joint exercise focused on enhancing the interoperability between the two militaries and countering the growing threat from missiles and rockets. In a meeting in Washington between Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon and U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, [Carter reaffirmed](#) America's “unshakeable commitment to the security of Israel and the importance of the U.S.-Israel defense relationship.” While we celebrate the shared U.S.-Israel community, we can never allow ourselves to take it for granted. Good community—like a good Seder—requires careful planning, great thought and a lot of hard work, to ensure that our two countries continue their powerful partnership for many years to come. ■

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