



Sermon Tidbits

NOVEMBER 20, 2017

Parashat Vayitzei

Inciting Children to Kill – Then and Now

And Jacob went (Genesis 28:10)

ויצא יעקב (בראשית כח:י)

Last July, as the Salomon family in the Halamish settlement enjoyed a Friday night Shabbat dinner celebrating the recent birth of a granddaughter, nineteen-year-old Omer Al-Abed [knocked on the door](#). When the door opened, Al-Abed rushed inside and fatally stabbed seventy-year-old Yosef Salomon, his son Eldad and daughter-in-law Chaya. Last week, [the Times of Israel reported](#) that members of the Salomon family who survived the attack visited the White House to lobby on behalf of the Taylor Force Act, legislation aimed at curbing benefit payments to the families of terrorists. A senior White House official said that during a meeting with President Trump’s Mideast peace envoy Jason Greenblatt, as well as National Security Council staffer Victoria Coates, Eldad’s wife Michal Salomon, “expressed dismay that the [family of the] terrorist would be receiving compensation from the Palestinian Authority for his action.” She also met with members of Congress who expressed sympathy for her loss and pledged to work towards the passage of the pending legislation. In our parashah we learn that hateful adults urging their children to commit violence and murders is not a new phenomenon. We find a disturbing example of this very behavior in a Midrash in *Parashat Vayitzei*.

Were any one of us to send our child on a journey to a foreign land, would we not send them with provisions and the necessary funds to survive? How then is it possible that Jacob arrived in Haran, a great distance from Beersheba, literally empty-handed? Did Isaac and Rebecca—who sent their son away—not give Jacob anything before he departed? According to the Midrash (*Sefer Hayashar*), after Jacob fled from his home in fear, Esau instructed his son Elifaz to chase after Jacob and kill him. Having grown up in Isaac’s home, Elifaz didn’t have the heart to carry out his father’s ruthless instructions and kill his uncle. On the other hand, his father had explicitly commanded him to kill Jacob. How could he disobey? “Jacob said to him, ‘Take all that is in my hands, for a pauper is comparable to the dead.’” By taking all of Jacob’s possessions, Elifaz could fulfill his father’s instructions and avoid the need to murder his uncle.

According to this chilling Midrash, Esau, filled with hate for his brother, instructed his son to translate that hatred into murder. Tragically, things have not changed much in the thousands of years that have passed since. Adults filled with hatred, continue to encourage their children to commit acts of violence and murder. Sometimes that encouragement is explicit through the glorification of terrorists and murderers. At other times the incitement happens implicitly, through an abhorrent system of payments to the families of those who murder innocent people.

In March 2016, U.S. Army veteran Taylor Force was murdered in a terrorist attack in Tel Aviv. Recognizing that the payment system of the Palestinian Authority to the families of terrorists incentivizes and encourages Palestinians to commit these murders, members of Congress introduced the Taylor Force Act in his memory. This legislation prohibits certain assistance to the Palestinian Authority unless the Department of State certifies that the PA is taking steps to end acts of violence against U.S. and Israeli citizens, publicly condemns such acts of violence and has terminated payments for acts of terrorism against U.S. and Israeli citizens. Last week, the House Foreign Affairs Committee [unanimously passed](#) the bill with broad bipartisan support, clearing the way for a full vote on the floor of the House of Representatives. We must thank the members Congress who co-sponsored this important bill and urge our senators and representatives to support the Taylor Force Act when it comes to a final vote.

During her visit to Washington, Michal Salomon [told the Algemeiner Journal that](#), “I feel a connection to Taylor Force, and to each and every one who is part of this family of terror victims... Taylor Force’s murderer is getting money just like my husband’s murderer is getting money.” We can try to ease the suffering of the members of both the Force and Salomon families, as well the many other families who have lost loved ones to senseless acts of terror, by doing our utmost to ensure that the United States forcefully presses the Palestinian leadership to end the practice of paying terrorists and their families. ■

The Ladder of History

And behold the angels of God (Genesis 28:12)

והנה מלאכי אלקים (בראשית כח:יב)

“It was a rejoicing that started with silence, and grew as the meeting neared its end. In the public lobby there were kisses and tears and excited laughter. In the delegates’ lounge a rabbi cried, ‘This is the day the Lord hath made! Let us rejoice in it and be glad!’” So wrote [Walter S. Sullivan in the New York Times](#) on November 30th, 1947 on the reaction to the historic United Nations vote to partition Palestine into two nations: one Jewish and one Arab. The Times of Israel [describes how](#) in Jerusalem, the staff of a local winery rolled a barrel into the middle of a downtown street and gave out free drinks. The Zionist leader Golda Meyerson—later to become Prime Minister Golda Meir—addressed the crowds from the balcony of the Jewish Agency building. “For two thousand years we have waited for our deliverance. Now that it is here it is so great and wonderful that it surpasses human words. Jews,” she cried, “Mazel tov!” Zionist delegate David Horowitz in his account of the events on that day wrote that, “a feeling that grips a man but once in his lifetime came over us. High above us we seemed to hear the beating of the wings of history.”

As Jacob journeys from Beersheba to Haran, he camps for the night at a “place” defined by the Sages as none other than Mount Moriah, the future epicenter of the Jewish faith. There he dreams of, “a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” (28:12) Scholars have for centuries offered different interpretations of Jacob’s dream and the symbolism of the angels climbing and descending the ladder. According to Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeni (*Pesikta D’rav Kahana* 23:2), Jacob’s ladder represents a vision of the unfolding of Jewish history. “This [story] teaches us that the Holy One showed our forefather Jacob that the [celestial] Minister of Babylonia rose seventy rungs and descend; [the Minister] of Media fifty two [rungs], and Greece one-hundred and twenty. The [Minister of Edom] rose and rose an unknown amount. At that moment Jacob feared a great fear and said, ‘Perhaps this one will not descend?’ [The Holy One] said to him: ‘Fear not O Israel... (*Jeremiah 30*)’ Professor Shalom Rosenberg [explains](#) that according to the Midrash, Jacob witnessed the rise of each of the nations that would dominate the world. “The ascension of the rungs of the ladder represents the period of growth and expansion of each nation, until it transformed into a superpower or empire. At some point, the process reverses.” When Jacob expresses his fear that Israel would never rise on the ladder, he is promised that his descendants would indeed one-day rise to great heights. Jacob dreamed the future of world history, but his dream did not reveal the ultimate end of the story and the rise of Israel on the ladder of history.

Jacob’s dream reminds us that story of *Vayeitzei* serves as the blueprint for the formation of the Jewish nation. At every step, Jacob and his descendants must leave the Holy Land to grow, develop and expand, thus paving the way for return. Jacob leaves his home alone and emptyhanded, but returns as the leader of a large and important family ready to take his inheritance. Jacob’s family descends to Egypt only to return many years later as a great nation of twelve tribes. Even today, after the terrible centuries of anti-Semitism and persecution, Jacob’s descendants have returned, with the help of the nations of the world, to build a Jewish homeland that has grown into a source of inspiration not only for the Jewish people, but for the entire international community.

The 1947 New York Times article on the reaction to the passage of the Partition Plan also [reported that](#), the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Dr. Isaac Herzog, almost overcome with joy said: “After a darkness of 2,000 years, the dawn of redemption has broken. This is an outstanding epoch not only in Jewish history but in world history.” We have no doubt that Jacob, who feared this day might never come, would agree. ■

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