

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

From Rav Binny Freedman

Portion of Ki Teitzeh

A Jew defining (and dressing) himself as Ultra-orthodox goes on a stabbing rampage at the LGBT pride parade in Jerusalem, murdering a 16 year old girl and seriously wounding five others.

Iranian leaders, while smiling for the cameras, lead marches declaring death to America, and promise to destroy the State of Israel and every last Jew on Earth, reminiscent of another Persian's attempt to do just that some 2500 years ago, in the story of Purim.

A suicide (homicide) bomber walks into a crowded Pizzeria in Jerusalem on a beautiful August afternoon in 2001 and detonates his bomb murdering 15 people and injuring scores more.....

What do all these events share in common?

This week, while standing on our rooftop in the Old City overlooking the Temple Mount above the Kotel, a few of us had the chance to watch and listen to a group of dozens of Muslim (Mourabitat) women, covered from head to toe in their religious garb, screaming and hurling epithets at a group of what appeared to be Western and Jewish tourists who were visiting the Temple Mount.

And what do all of these people seem to share in common? Hate; pure, unabashed, unbridled and unmitigated hatred; for others; who are different; simply because they are different....

Some would say these women were simply exercising their freedom of speech and that such passionate belief and adherence to principal is admirable. But to me, it is simply another manifestation of hatred.

And one wonders: why do they hate us so much? Why is a Country like Iran w 10,000 people for every Jew so dedicated to our annihilation? Why is Hamas' charter dedicated to the eradication of Jews everywhere?

I remember spending time as a young soldier in Lebanon; it is such a beautiful country; yet it remains devastated and constantly on the verge of conflict, largely because the Hezbollah cannot make peace with the fact that there is now a State with a Jewish majority on its borders. Hatred has blinded them to what life could be.

Historians and philosophers have written countless books and articles debating what caused Germany and so many countries to be so dedicated to the destruction of the Jews that they murdered close to seven million people including 1 and a half million children.

Some say it was economics, but if it were just economics the Jews should have been part of the solution. If economics were the root cause of Anti-Semitism then Hamas, the PLO and Lebanon would long ago have figured out it makes much more sense economically to make peace with Israel than to exacerbate a war which has been ongoing for nigh on a hundred years.

Others suggest it is because we are so different, but that would not explain why hundreds of thousands of fully assimilated Jews including those who had converted to Catholicism, were sent to the Ovens along with everyone else.

No, it is what it has always been: it's just plain old fashioned hatred, which actually does not have to be logical.

So what does Judaism have to say about hatred?

This week's portion of *Ki Teitze* which deals with some of the laws of conflict and how Jews are meant to behave in battle contains a fascinating mitzvah:

“... *Do not despise an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land.* “

(Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:8)

Incredibly, we are forbidden to despise the nation we might be most expected to hate!

Egypt enslaved us for over two hundred years, using babies for bricks and mortar and came in Jewish tradition to represent cruelty par excellence. And all this despite the fact that it was a Jew (Joseph) who saved the entire country from famine (Genesis 41) and transformed it into a regional and then a world power. So why are we enjoined from hating them?

Why shouldn't we hate Hamas, Iran, Hezbollah, neo-Nazis and Nazi murderers who still live, having escaped Justice after such heinous crimes? Do they really deserve any better? Don't BDS activists who never let the facts get in the way of their own hatred and lies deserve our hatred?

Some say that even after all of our suffering in Egypt, we still owe the Egyptians a debt of gratitude for taking the family of Yaakov in when there was a devastating famine in the land, not to mention the fact that Moshe was raised by no less than the daughter of Pharaoh. This line of reasoning in the Midrash would posit that this mitzvah not to hate Egyptians is all about gratitude. But perhaps it goes even deeper.

Who really suffers from our anger? Actually, we do. The Rambam (Maimonides *Hilchot Deot (Laws of character development)* chap. 6) implies that the reason we are not meant to hate is because hatred eats up our souls. And if we are not allowed to hate Egyptians, then obviously we are not meant to hate anyone.

Hatred comes when others do not see things the way we do, and when we expect that the way we see the world is the way everyone should see it (See Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv)'s introduction to the book of Bereishit ...).

We can certainly disagree with another person's perspective, but only if we first respect the person. And hatred occurs when we lose sight of the value of the person that lies behind the perspective, different as it may be.

Hatred has a way of poisoning the soul, causing us to lose reason and perspective, with catastrophic results. We owe it to ourselves to be sure we do not allow the hatred around us, to cause us to become hateful as well. In fact, a person who is full of hatred is truly enslaved and it was only in our ability to let go of that hatred, when we got out of Egypt, that we were truly free.

It would be easy to mobilize people by stoking the flames of hatred; that was what Adolph Hitler did, and that is what leaders are doing in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, the Gaza strip and the Palestinian Authority.

We have to be better; Three thousand years ago, on the banks of the Jordan River, Moshe exhorts us to judge evil actions, but not evil people. We can hate the sin, without hating the sinner; in whatever form he or she takes

May Hashem bless us with a year full of peace and tolerance and love, alongside the willingness to fight the battles that need to be fought.

Shabbat Shalom and K'tivah ve'chatimah Tovah

Best wishes for a sweet happy and healthy new year.

Binny Freedman