

Emor: Compassion and the Current War

- Nisson Shulman.

Emor requires us to sanctify Hashem's name. No greater sanctification than the Jewish compassionate heart, the beating heart of humanity. Expressed by interruption of the holiday commandments to include gifts to the poor just then, between the commands of the holidays.

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Last week we read Kedoshim Tihyu, be Holy. It is also a command to show that God is Holy. The same command is repeated in its negative form this week, Lo tehalelu et shem kadshi.

There is no sanctification of God's Name, no better way to demonstrate God's holiness, no Kiddush Hashem as great, no testimony to the glory and love of God as great as that rendered by the compassionate Jewish heart!

This is expressed in countless ways in the Torah, and even in our own Torah portion, so that when Torah commands the observance of holidays in our reading, it interrupts right in the middle of the holidays to emphasize the gifts to the poor and to the sensitive stranger; emphasizing in this way that no holiday is complete or truly observed unless we in its observance express our care for the less fortunate, and even that the Temple service of the Bet Hamikdash is made meaningful when it inspires us to deeds of love and compassion. Rashi quotes a Midrash saying that gifts to the poor are placed between the commandment of Passover and Shavuoth on the one hand and Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur and Sukkot on the other hand, to teach that these gifts make the Temple service with all its ceremonies meaningful and he who observes these commandments of compassion is as if he himself has actually built the Bet Hamikdash! For he has made his life holy and thereby brought glory to the Lord God of Israel. And, says the Midrash, our compassion is only the reflection of God's compassion.

The Talmud says compassion has become the hallmark of the Jew. And Rabbi Yehuda Halevi declares Jews are the compassionate beating heart of the human race!

Is this chauvinism? I admit that the human race shows compassion, and the media is most anxious to express compassion for the "Arab victims", but it is compassion often motivated by politics, and more recently by more sinister motives and considerations.

The conscience of the human being is often selective. Consider the words of a well known writer, Dennis Prager, who pointed out that in China millions of girls are aborted, countless others killed at birth and millions more sold to brothels or to men who cannot otherwise marry; in India thousands of women are burned to death by husbands and their families seeking larger dowries; in Pakistan, according to that country's Commission on the Status of Women, nearly thirty million are born in near slavery and die invariably in oblivion. We do not know this. But most of us know all about the hardship of the "Palestinians".

He also pointed out that in 1972 more than 200,000 blacks of the Hutu nation in Africa were

systematically murdered by the Tutsis, and that in 1988 another 20000 were murdered! That in the 1980s, there were already four million black African refugees. That in the first decade of its independence, one third of all the citizens of the Black African nation of Equatorial Guinea was forced into exile. (Do we know that Equatorial Guinea exists?) Between 1982 and 1985 approximately 300,000 black Africans in Uganda were slaughtered. And this followed Idi Amin's slaughter of approximately 500,000 black Africans. Hundreds of thousands of black Africans were killed by the Arab Islamic fundamentalist regime in the Sudan. And this regime also flogs, amputates the limbs of and crucifies blacks. In 1989 the Islamic government of Mauritania expelled approximately 1000 blacks a day from that country.

It is probable that very few people of any in America know these facts and figures. But they all know about every terrorist Israel tracked and killed, they all know about houses and cars destroyed to make way for Israeli tanks. They all know if one Arab is killed in the territories. (Of course, they would not know of the ten year old Arab boy carrying bombs with which to blow up Israeli soldiers.)

The point is that righteous indignation of all people seems to be very selective, and frequently motivated by motives other than compassion. King Solomon called this hypocrisy, "Hesed leumim hatat".

We also recognize a limitation to compassion. We can't police the whole world. We can't give health care to the whole world either, so we start with our own country, and with limited resources. Charity does begin at home.

Which makes us understand better the comment Maimonides made, *ulemi aniyeh Yisrael nosim eyneyhem, Hakeajyn asher sonim otam verodfim ahareyhem? Ha eyn eyneyhem teluyot ela leaheyhen* (Hilchot Matnot Aniyim 10:2).

We are the last and only hope of Jews who are oppressed, of the victims of the families of the homicidal suicide bombers, of the pogrom in Kiev, of the Synagogue bombings in France, and no-one knows it better than we.

So when we hear of the pogroms that are threatening Jews anywhere, and that the conditions in Europe are getting worse for Jews; that the Jews who still remain in France – the country of *liberte egalite, fraternite*, - when we hear of the anti-Semitism reborn, and growing, and arson against Jewish institutions everywhere in Europe, we become more keenly sensitive to the fact that we are their hope. That immigration to Israel is now going to increase and the absorption of the new immigrants is not only Israel's task but is ours. The vast majority of our people in Israel – right and left – have learned the bitter lesson that there is no peace at any price; because the "at any price" is the destruction of Israel. One day we will have a fair peace, and a secure one, but that will only be with the help of the Almighty, and the Almighty demands we earn and deserve His help; by overcoming the divisiveness with which we are plagued in Israel and becoming a united people; by *mitzvot*; by caring; by readiness to sacrifice, by defending our hard-won land and by protecting our endangered and persecuted brothers wherever they may be in the world.

Abba Eban once declared that the Arabs have never missed any opportunity to miss an

opportunity. We therefore do not know how this proposed disengagement will turn out after all. We know that even those for it are considering the strategic needs of Israel. We also know that too much compassion on others can be cruelty upon our brothers. Too eager a desire to come to an agreement could - God forbid - rebound and cause terrible suffering for our own people in Israel. That is a lesson we have learned the hard and bitter way. We pray that we shall never have to learn it this way again. Israel must become united again, not only Jew with fellow Jew, but with Jews the world over. Keeping it that way is our only and our best hope for the future.

One day there will be a just and lasting, compassionate peace; but only when all our people in Israel shall be secure and safe; and only then will a peace agreement be part of the unfolding of the process of Geulah, the manifestation of God's compassion here on earth, for his people as for all mankind.