VAYISHLACH: Proportionality in the war against Hamas

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THE NATIONS, UNITED AGAINST ISRAEL

Most of the world's nations systematically criticize and demonize Israel when Israel defends itself from terrorist attacks. And when the crime of Israel's enemies is so great that our political foes can no longer justify calling for Israel's passivity, they use one of their favorite arguments: "Israel must defend itself proportionally to the crime to which it was subjected." These nations use this aberrant argument with just one purpose in mind: restraining Israel and preventing her victory. After the fact, it also serves to delegitimize and demonize Israel and as an invitation to the enemy to continue with its aggression. Israel, of course, should not listen (and B"H is not presently listening) to these claims coming from those who fervently wish for the disappearance of a Jewish State.

I want to present a historical episode—a crime against the newborn family of Israel and their subsequent reaction to that crime, found in this week's Parasha Vayishlach, chapter 34 of Genesis. We might learn a valuable lesson from this story.

THE INNOCENCE OF DINA

Jacob and his children finally settled in the land of Israel near the city of Shechem. One day, Dina, Yaakob's only daughter and sister of twelve boys, visits the neighboring town to meet the local girls. She is young and has gone out alone without the protection of her brothers. Dina, mistakenly, is not afraid because she was raised in a safe place for women: Yaakob's house. She is unaware of the behavior of men in those places and ended up in their vicious

hands.

The attacker was Shechem (named after his own town). He was King Hamor's son. This prince, who probably lacked nothing, saw the young Jewish girl "took her by force, subdued her, and raped her." After raping her, he became obsessed with Dina and kidnapped her.

Jacob's family finds out what is happening. They "are sad and outraged" at the abomination committed by these people.

Meanwhile, the entitled young man asks his father to "acquire this girl for him as a wife" (□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□□□□□). King Hamor offers Jacob's family money to keep Dina: "You set the value of the dowry", he tells them, "and I will pay it to you." But Jacob's sons have a different plan. They deceive the king with words he understands: "We are willing to join your people in marriage and trade. But on one condition: first, you must be circumcised." The inhabitants of Shechem, thinking about future benefits, undergo mass circumcision.

THE POWER OF DETERRENCE

On the third day after the circumcision, which is when the pain is most evident, Shimon and Levi, Dina's brothers by father and mother, carry out a military rescue operation: they attack the city, which was incapable of defending itself and kill all men, they destroy the city and finally rescue their sister Dina from captivity.

The reaction of Jacob's sons was not proportional to the crime they suffered. Jacob objected to what his sons did (I follow in this explanation the opinion of Rabbi David Qimchi) and told them: "You are destroying me! You have put me in danger before all the nations of this region since now they are going to unite among themselves, attack us, and eliminate me and my entire family." Ya'akob, explains Rabbi Quimchi, was afraid of the potential violent reaction of his neighbors, who were much

more numerous than his family and could easily attack and destroy him. His sons, who, according to Rabbi Qimchi showed more courage than Jacob, said to his father: “Are we going to allow our sister to be treated like a prostitute?”

WHO WAS RIGHT?

The previous chapter ends without a final verdict from the Tora regarding this argument: did the brothers do the right thing by disproportionately attacking the inhabitants of Shechem?

To find an indirect but unequivocal verdict, we must continue reading the next chapter, 35.

Jacob’s family prepares to leave the place. When they break camp and are about to leave, they know it is a moment of extreme vulnerability. It would be natural for their enemies to attack them then. Jacob knows it. There is tension in the air. Verse 5 says it all in one word, “VAYISAU.” “And they began their journey”. Then, there is almost a full stop (atnach), creating suspense and expectation as to what the enemy will do next. Then, the Tora says with his usual economy of words: “But the nations of the region were possessed by a ‘divine’ (supernatural) fear and did not persecute Jacob’s family.”

The non-proportionate reaction of Shimon and Levi had the desired effect: it persuaded the nations of the region that these Jews were unpredictable and it was not wise to mess with them. The Tora thus issued its verdict: a proportional response could have endangered Jacob. Shimon and Levi’s disproportionate response created a deterrent for the entire hostile neighborhood.

SHIMON LEVI AND THE ISRAEL ARMY

As I mentioned on previous occasions, the present history of the Jewish people, especially since 1948, is like a biblical

déjà vu: it feels that we have already lived similar experiences that are recorded in our biblical genetic memory. We see how the pattern of behavior of our enemies—violence, outrage, kidnapping—is repeated exponentially. But perhaps we can also learn from biblical events a thing or two regarding the appropriate response to the Shoatic massacre of last October 7: Israel does not have to react proportionally to the massacre. Israel must respond in a non-proportionate manner that will prevent this crime from being repeated by Hamas or other enemies of Israel. Israel must react in a way that creates a 'supernatural deterrent among our relentless enemies. There is no other way.

My friend Mordechai Kedar already said it: the Lebanese officials warned Hezbollah not to mess with Israel when they saw the destruction of Gaza City. They don't want Beirut to look like Gaza! And the words they used were: "Israel went mad. Israelis are dangerously out of their mind." The non-proportional response deterred the enemy and made them think twice before attacking us. If Israel does not destroy Hamas, if it does not reach a complete humiliating lesson, it risks being attacked by Hamas and our other neighbors.

Israel, like the sons of Jacob, not only has to be the most muscular guy in the Middle East neighborhood but the most unpredictable if attacked as well. The non-proportionality of the response to the enemy's attack is the existential strategy for the future of the Jewish state.

LOVE OF DEATH

There is an additional reason why Israel cannot proportionally defend itself against an enemy like Hamas. It is a very delicate topic, misunderstood by most of the world and cynically abused by Hamas as propaganda material. It has to do with the total moral asymmetry between Judaism and jihadism regarding the value of life.

This topic, absolutely critical to understanding Israel's phenomenal vulnerabilities, was masterfully formulated by the American journalist Charles Krauthammer, who died a few years ago. He wrote the following words in January 2009 when Israel was fighting against Hamas in response to a series of suicide attacks and the murder of three young Israelis. After relentless international pressure over the Palestinian victims, Israel had to suspend its attack and back down:

"Some geopolitical conflicts are morally complicated. The Israel-Gaza war is not. It possesses a moral clarity that is not only rare but excruciating. […] For Hamas, the only thing more prized than dead Jews are dead Palestinians."



Krauthammer explains the inconceivable: that Hamas "celebrates" the martyrdom, the death of its civilians, not just because, according to their religion, they inherit a sexual paradise in the afterlife but also because their deaths is a critical factor in the Jihad, it creates a precious "prized" element that brings Israel to its knees, when the Jewish army is about to defeat Hamas, by tremendous international pressure.

The idea that the deaths of one's own citizens serve as a tool of pressure in the international arena is very difficult to

digest for a person with Western morality. But it explains, for example, why Hamas has no problem hiding behind civilians or storing arsenals in hospitals and schools or why Hamas fighters opened fire on their population when they were leaving northern Gaza while Israel, ironically, protected the civilians with his tanks.

The proportional and still abhorrent response that our political enemies always propose, “I should kill one person from your side for every person you kill on my side”, will never deter a movement that embraces the martyrdom of Jihad. Even if the proportion is higher: 10 x 1 or 100 x 1, this will not make Hamas put down its weapons and surrender, since for Jihdist, the death that Jihad causes to civilians is morally and religiously justified, as long as they can be attributed to the Zionist army, and serves to exacerbate international public opinion with cynical claims of genocide.

The following words by Ismail Haniyeh, one of the actual leaders of Hamas, explain it all: “We [Hamas] love death to the same extent that our enemy [Israel] loves life.”



LAND > LIFE

But if the death of its fighters and civilians—15,000, 20,000, or more—does not mean a defeat for Hamas, what should be

Israel’s response to deter the terrorist enemy? According to Israeli journalist Guy Bechor, the only sobering response to terror and the only significant and actually “proportional” punishment that Hamas should suffer, beyond losing its political power, is to lose part of its territories in Gaza. Why? Because for the jihadist Palestinian narrative, land is more precious than life. This would be Hamas’s nightmare. The recovery of Gush Katif and the creation of 5 km of territorial security belts by Israel would represent the most significant defeat for Hamas and a deterrent of Biblical dimensions for them and for all the peoples of the region. I hope and pray that this “proportional” response is part of Netanyahu’s plans for the day after the war.

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