
If God wrapped in zeal, intervened precisely because no man did so, then it could be argued that just as “God clothed Himself with garments of retribution, wrapped Himself in zeal,” so did Moses. Instructively, the Midrash does not allow for any such emulation of the divine, arguing that zealotry and retribution are exclusive divine prerogatives (*Midrash HaGadol Genesis*, p. 619), for only God can keep them under control (*Genesis Rabbah* 49,8). Zeal is so prone to go amok, only God can be trusted to wield it.

Since zealotry cannot be used to legitimate extra-legal activity, Moses’ act had to be justified on other grounds. Thus the above sources seek to establish that the Egyptian was culpable of a capital crime, that Moses had consulted with a court, albeit of angels; and lastly, that Moses killed him either by the power of the Divine Name or with his fist. As a non-lethal weapon, the fist is mentioned to indicate that Moses meant to stop the Egyptian, not to kill him. The introduction of the Divine Name indicated that Moses’ destructive power was subject to divine approval not just human discretion.

These safeguards did not suffice. The Egyptian also had to be bereft of the saving grace of righteous descendants for when a man is slain unjustly, those responsible must answer “for his blood as well as that of his descendants till the end of the world” (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 4:5).

The restrictions on the means of slaying and the demand that the culprit lack future righteous progeny are not immaterial. By setting superhuman standards, the Midrash precludes the incident from serving as a precedent for human behavior. Thus, a model for zealotry or self-help was eliminated through the introduction of divine checks, or legalized through the introduction of judicial restraints. Regardless of the status of the killer or the intensity of the zeal, killing is unwarranted. Thus our opening Midrash finds Moses’ case for slaying the Egyptian wanting. Lacking the power to restore life, Moses is in no position to usurp the divine prerogative to take life. □

We are not immune

Philip J. Bentley

The first time I noticed it was in 1981. I was on a post-convention tour of Israel for rabbis and their spouses. Our tour guide spoke of the Settlements as we travelled

PHILIP J. BENTLEY is President of the Jewish Peace Fellowship and Rabbi of Temple Sholom in Floral Park, NY.

through the Occupied Territories on the West Bank. He showed us how much more modern and productive the Jewish farms looked than the Arab-owned lands. He did not attribute this to greater financial resources or greater knowledge of modern agronomy. He told us that the Land will not produce for the Arabs like it will produce for Jews, because this is our land and the Land knows its true people. He insisted that far from being a right-wing Likud-nik, he was a life-long member of the Labor Party although he lived in Ma’aleh Adumim which was built just outside of Jerusalem on land occupied by Israel in 1967.

I immediately recognized this theory for what it was—old-fashioned blood-and-soil fascism. When I tried discussing my distress at hearing this kind of rhetoric with my colleagues, they either dismissed my concerns or asked me not to make a scene. I kept quiet even when we were passing by Nablus and the guide remarked, “This is the ancient town of Shekhem where Shimon and Levi performed their heroic deeds.” Their heroic deeds? The massacre of a town full of men who had circumcised themselves so that their prince could marry Jacob’s daughter? The massacre that Jacob condemned even in his final blessing to his sons? What Torah did this man learn? It was surely not the same one I study.

Since Oslo, religious and secular leaders of this movement have called for armed response to government forces—whether Israeli or Palestinian—carrying out legal policies. They have called for the murder of government officials based on perverted interpretations of *halakhah*. Add this to their belief in a mystical connection between Jewish blood and Israel’s soil; their elevation of Jewish possession of the Land over all other values; their demonization of Arabs as “*Amalek*” and of Jews who support the Peace Process as traitors or worse; and their belief that God demands of Israel that it expel non-Jews from the land or subjugate them even if it means war because the Redemption depends on it.

Advertisements and public statements, since Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, by Jewish groups opposed to the Peace Process all say the same thing. They regret that this has happened and that Jews should unite, but that no one should “use” this murder “for political advantage.” It is a time to promote Jewish unity, but not at the expense of once again ignoring the deadly cancer that exists in Israel and among some Jews the world over—fascism. The time has come to confront the ugly reality and to try to excise this ideological tumor that has grown among us.

Any rabbi in Israel who continues to call for violent opposition to the peace process must be removed from any official position by the Chief Rabbinate. Any American rabbi espousing such views should be publicly

censured by the American rabbinate. The rhetoric of violence should no longer be tolerated in our synagogues, community centers and schools. We must make public the true nature of groups raising money for the radical right-wing fringe groups that are causing so much mischief in Israel and in the Diaspora. Any settlement that engages in ongoing violence against Arabs or Israelis should be disbanded.

These extremists should not be allowed to stifle legitimate debate by continuing to poison the political atmosphere with their outrageous rhetoric. Public debate and non-violent political action on the issues of peacemaking must go on. There will not be peace if a significant number of Israeli Jews feels that its concerns have not been heard and taken into consideration. If the Peace Process is to work, as I hope and pray it will, it must be as the result of a free and open debate on the issues with all of the risks responded to. The ultimate success of the Zionist enterprise must be based on the security interests of Israel as well as on the prophetic principles of justice and peace which equally fired the commitment of Israel's founders. □

Of sad ironies and deadly bullets

Aaron I. Reichel

We now realize that the Prime Minister would have been spared his personal and fatal tragedy, and the nation would have been spared its unprecedented trauma, had the Labor government bowed to the will of the people and called for new elections or at least reassessed the "Peace Process" when it became apparent that a majority of the Jews in the Israeli Parliament voted against "Oslo II," in light of the realities and disappointments caused by Arafat's consistent violations of the spirit and the letter of "Oslo" and by his inability and/or unwillingness to stand up to the terrorists who are honest enough to at least be consistent.

I mourn the loss of a soldier and a statesman who rose to the top of both chains of command in service to his country, but I mourn, also, the fact that, after his Arab "partner" in "peace" openly and repeatedly revealed in Arab forums that his goal of annihilating the Zionists had not changed, a man as bright and as perceptive as the Prime Minister of Israel did not want to believe what he had heard, and did not opt to hear or heed the will of his co-religionists, but succumbed instead, to the will of an assassin, a will to kill, whose now infamous implementa-

AARON I. REICHEL, a rabbi, practices law in New York City.

tion of this desire is likely, ironically, to serve only to give the Labor government further rationalizations to try to kill the spirit of Israel's most idealistic heroes on the West Bank, the settlers, many of whom left the comforts of home and the luxuries of America, *at Rabin's personal request*, and based on his personal promises of assistance and eternal appreciation.

Notwithstanding the most unsettling manner in which Rabin's voice has been silenced, let the further irony not go unnoticed that what most opponents of the late Prime Minister's policies objected to were not merely his unilateral concessions to Arafat in exchange for Arafat's unilateral violations of the letter and the spirit of the "Peace Accords." The people who are now in the Opposition are especially aggrieved, as well, by the Labor government's flagrantly anti-democratic and sometimes cruel and selective censorship of some media and suppression of some dissent and political rallies of opposition groups even after these groups went to the trouble of painstakingly obtaining permits to demonstrate and/or formally requesting permission to conduct peaceful demonstrations in situations wherein permits were and are not required by law. How ironic that Rabin might still be alive today had the Labor government, like its predecessor governments, simply permitted free speech and assembly without exceptions for political reasons. How further ironic that the assassination occurred precisely at a demonstration the likes of which the Labor government was denying to many of its Jewish political opponents. □

Of zealots and hanukkah

Cary Kozberg

As we come to terms with the meaning and repercussions of the Rabin assassination, an act that most Jews view as heinous and virtually unthinkable, we find ourselves in the midst of a holiday commemorating a war of survival which began when the observant, faithful Jew Matithias (a *kohen*, no less!) did "the unthinkable"—he killed a fellow Jew.

But in the Hanukkah story, it was not unthinkable; it was "a *mitzvah*". The account in *I Maccabees* compares the action of Matithias to that of an earlier "fanatic", Pinhas ben Eleazar, whose zeal for God during an earlier time of chaos and confusion also motivated him to kill

RABBI CARY KOZBERG is Director of Rabbinical and Pastoral Services at Wexner Heritage Village, Columbus, OH.