

Enough of Moral Equivalence

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There is an incredible midrash^[1] that describes King David himself laying the foundation for the Temple that his son King Solomon would eventually build atop Mount Zion in the heart of Jerusalem. I personally witnessed the whole foundation- laying process first-hand this summer, as our new house was being renovated and added-on to. The contractors brought massive diggers into our back yard, and before any cement was poured or surfaces laid, a whole lot of earth had to be moved. A pit had to be dug...it was muddy and messy. Well, old King David didn't have an earth mover to prepare the Temple's foundation. This labor was 'manual' in the literal sense of the word. The midrash imagines the great king, shovel in hand, down on his hands and knees scooping out the Jerusalem soil himself. As a child, I remember thinking if I dug deep enough, I could dig a tunnel all the way to China! Evidently King David dug so deep that he reached not Shanghai, but the "*tehom*," that chaotic, primordial, subterranean water that burst forth from the depths and destroyed the world in the Noah story of this morning's parasha. The Torah says that when the flood finally ended, *Vayisachru ma'ynot tehom*, God plugged up the waters that were spewing forth from the depths,^[2] *vayshuvu hamayim mei'al ha'aretz*...and those wild destructive waters returned to their place of origin deep inside the earth.^[3] You see it wasn't just rain from the sky that flooded the earth, it was also waters rising up from the very depths of the earth itself! It was that gurgling inner-earth liquid that King David dug down to. And when he saw it, he was terrified. As an antidote, he scrawled God's name onto a shard of stone, and threw it down into the deep, causing those violent waters to recede 16,000 cubits. The message of this vivid midrash, is that menacing chaos and destruction lies just beneath the surface. All one has to do is scrape away the crust, and it will be revealed.

In these past few weeks, we have witnessed the bubbling up of those terrifying, devastating waters of destruction...and not far from where the midrash imagined King David digging thousands of years ago...in the very environs of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Maybe the Midrash is teaching that the flood waters are held back precisely beneath the Temple Mount, because that place has been a flash-point for centuries...a piece of real estate that has been razed,

burned, and pulverized by Babylonians, Romans, Umayyads, Mameluks, Crusaders, Ottomans...It was the seat of the virulently anti-Semitic, Nazi sympathizer Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and the platform from which Jordanian snipers fired at Jews in pre-1967 Jerusalem. The latest flare up can be attributed to none other than Mahmoud Abbas, the one-time Holocaust denying and current president of the Palestinian Authority who fabricated a myth that Israel intends to change the status quo on the Temple Mount. Now please remember that the Temple Mount, *Har Ha'Bayit* as it is referred to in Hebrew, is the holiest site in Judaism. Not the Western Wall...that's just as close as most of us ever get to the place where both the first and second Temples actually stood, above the wall, on that mountain top. It is mentioned hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible (and the New Testament for that matter), and exactly zero times in the Q'uran. Yet it is the third holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina. And what is the status quo of the holiest site in Judaism and the third holiest site in Islam? The status quo is that it is essentially off-limits to Jews; the space belongs to the Muslims, who administer the site with Israeli approval, and regard it in its entirety as a sacred place for Muslims. Jews are not permitted to gather there or to pray there...although under certain circumstances individual Jews are allowed to visit. I did just that, back in 1999, when Sari and I were in Israel for my rabbinical school year in Jerusalem. I happened to go at the right time, on the right day and I was granted admission. I circled the foundation stone beneath the Dome of the Rock, and I entered the Al Aqsa Mosque on the other end of the platform. Someone at the door handed me a tourist pamphlet about the site. I knelt down in the position assumed by Muslims when they pray. I was attempting to be respectful. I opened the pamphlet which stated in no uncertain terms that no Jewish temple ever stood on this site, and that its holiness was exclusive to where Muhammad allegedly took a night journey to heaven to commune with God and the other prophets before returning to earth and riding his winged horse al-Burak back to Arabia. As I looked incredulously at this document that erased any Jewish connection to that place, the man at the door barked at me to get up and leave. Apparently sitting on my knees was not taken as the expression of respect I had hoped to convey.

Just this week I was on a conference call with Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat. Mayor Barkat is a secular Jew...he is not part of the fringe ultra-Orthodox Jews who come up with crack-pot

scenarios to overtake the temple mount. He assured us that **there is absolutely no Israeli government plan to reoccupy that place** or even to allow Jews to congregate there. It was a total fabrication of President Mahmoud Abbas to incite anger and violence among the Palestinians.

Another Abbas fabrication is that Israelis are executing Palestinian youths. This whole argument is so sick and twisted because the youths he is talking about are the teens that he and the PA have radicalized to go out and attack innocent Israelis with kitchen knives and meat cleavers. Yes some of them have been shot in order to stop them from attacking others. But the youth he specifically referred to is Ahmed Manasra a 13 year old Palestinian who knifed a Jewish boy the same age who was riding his bicycle. Yes, the police forcibly intervened to stop him, only he wasn't killed. In fact he is being treated at this very moment at Hadassah Hospital by Jewish doctors and nurses! After the media confirmed that Ahmed was in fact alive and recovering in the hospital, Abbas went on Palestinian television and continued to promote the lie that he had been killed!

The gruesome attacks, many of which have been captured on film and have been shared on social media are almost too barbaric to believe. The video of the attack last week in the Ge'ulah neighborhood of Jerusalem, where the terrorist plowed his car into a bus stop filled with people, then got out of his car with a machete and tried to hack away at anyone who was still standing was like a scene out of a horror movie. I was sick to my stomach watching this. The victims of these random acts of violence are not necessarily soldiers or policemen...they are children, old men and women, parents holding babies. I want to share with you something that a dear colleague^[4] of ours from Dallas who made aliyah with her family a few months ago wrote about an experience they recently had:

This morning Jeff and I drove to Ashkelon...Yehudah was sleeping peacefully in the back seat when we pulled over to fill up with gas. There weren't a lot of people around and Jeff got out to pay and pump. I looked out the window and noticed a non-descript 18-25 year old male walking towards Jeff. Immediately my pulse quickened. I was suddenly alert. I watched as he approached Jeff and came a little too close for my comfort. I went from alert to panic. I looked around me for

anything I could use as a weapon, willing myself to remember anything I'd learned in a self-defense class fifteen years ago. I looked back at the baby trying to decide how I could get him out of the car seat. The young man was asking Jeff a question and Jeff took out two coins and handed them over to him. The man glanced up at the camera near our car. I glanced over towards a police car in the next parking lot. Jeff got back in the car. Turns out the man needed money for gas. Jeff had gone through much of the same thought process as I had. I hate that I'm now suspicious of everyone. No not everyone. Everyone who my mind's eye convinces me might be a terrorist. This isn't how I was raised, this is not how I want to live.

Please, Hashem, give council to the minds and hearts of leaders to bring us towards peace.

This is just one account that describes the fear and skepticism that these random acts of terror have created. And there is simply no adequate, rational, proportional explanation for this killing spree. Not settlements, not the occupation, nothing. This bloodletting was fomented by Abbas because the Palestinians are not the story of the Middle East; because they are only one of many crises in a region that is also home to ISIS, Assad, Hezbollah, and now the Russians flying overhead. And wouldn't you know it, he accomplished his goal of putting the Palestinians back in the news cycle! Ba Ki Moon was right on cue when he announced his criticism of Israel's defensive measures against machete wielding terrorists without actually condemning the terrorists themselves. And John Kerry predictably equivocated about terrorists "on both sides of this divide." NO Secretary Kerry, NO General Secretary Moon, there is no comparison here. There is no moral equivalency here. There is no proper, civilized explanation for dragging people out of their rock-smashed cars and beating them to a bloody pulp in the middle of the highway, or ambushing old women crossing the street, or boarding public buses and spraying bullets at passengers, or murdering parents in the front seat of their car while their children watch as they become orphans in the back seat. Yes the occupation is miserable. It was miserable in 1993 when Yassir Arafat walked away an offer of nearly complete control of the West Bank and Gaza. It was miserable in 2000 when Arafat again turned down an offer for an independent Palestinian state in almost all of the West Bank, Gaza, and with a share of Jerusalem to boot as a capital. It was miserable in 2008 when Abbas rejected Prime Minister Olmert's offer of 93% of the West Bank, all of Gaza, and a tunnel between them to create territorial contiguity. Even the allegedly intransigent Prime Minister Netanyahu has offered vast territorial compromise only to

be met with deflection and rejection from Abbas and the Palestinians.^[5] So tell me, who is serious about peace and who wants to perpetuate conflict? Who has been willing to make painful concessions and who has not even taken the smallest steps toward ending the conflict? I am sick and tired of left wing media, of certain Western leaders, and even certain Jews depicting this as a quid pro quo conflict. It isn't. Mayor Barkat of Jerusalem said to us on the phone that the municipality has been working directly with Arab school principals in east Jerusalem to keep kids off the streets by offering meaningful after school programs, and counseling them not to heed the calls to violence. And he said that the Arab school principals themselves feel undermined by the Palestinian Authority, which continues to run commercials and programs on television encouraging bloodshed, demonstrating how to lethally wield a knife, or stealthily attack an unsuspecting victim!!

Friends, enough is enough. I pray for peace in Israel every single day. I want all people in the region, Jews, Arabs, Christians, Bedouin, Druze, all to live in peace and security. I want every child to grow up not with hate infecting their hearts, but with hope for a better future. But I have no expectation that the current cast of "leaders" have the desire or capability of making that a reality. Facts are facts, and most Israelis say they want to live side-by-side and at peace with an independent Palestinian state...and most Palestinians are still so possessed with vitriolic hatred that they can't even acknowledge that Jews have a connection to the very land underneath their feet.

We asked Mayor Barkat what we can do in North America to be supportive. He said "*hasbarah*," the Hebrew word for public relations. Counter the myths, the lies, the misinformation that abounds on social media, in the press, and that is propounded by certain politicians. Be Israel's spokespeople through your elected officials, letters to the editor, conversations with neighbors, co-workers and friends. Come to Israel, don't stay away and grant the terrorists the victory of making Jews afraid to go to their ancestral homeland. "Help us fight terrorism by not being terrorized," he said. And most of all, never allow the world to be silent when Jews are attacked, but damning when Jews defend themselves. Jewish lives matter, Jewish blood is sacred. In the darkest centuries and eras, the Jewish people never gave up hope, never

gave into oppression, never lost the will to live. Let us continue to live with that hope in our hearts for a better future, for peace for all people, and for a world that is more just and more humane. May those destructive waters that King David glimpsed stay buried far beneath the surface, and may every place in the world, beginning with the Temple Mount and Jerusalem itself know only peace. *Am Yisrael Chai Ad Belidai*...the People of Israel Live: today, tomorrow, forever!