

YES! DARFUR IS OUR BUSINESS
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**(AN EDITED VERSION OF THE SERMON DELIVERED BY RABBI HASKEL LOOKSTEIN
AT CKJ ON MARCH 18, 2006, SHABBAT PARAH 5766)**

“Love of all creatures requires great effort, that it may be broadened to the fullest extent. Due to our lack of experience, this love may appear to be a matter of little importance, even contrary to the Torah and common ethics. However, in truth, it must constantly fill all the chambers of the soul.

The highest level of our love for all creatures must be the love of humanity, which should extend to all its members. Despite the differences of religion and ideology, despite the differences of race and environment, one should try to understand the mentality of various nations and factions as much as possible, in order to appreciate their character and nature. Then one can know how to base the love of humanity on foundations that lead to actual deed.

Only when the soul is enriched by the love of all creatures and all humanity can the love of Israel be elevated to its lofty station and attain greatness, both in spirit and in practice. It is a mean eye that causes one to see only ugliness and impurity in everything beyond the bounds of Israel, the unique nation. This is one of the most awful, debased forms of darkness. It damages the entire edifice of spiritual virtue, the light of which every sensitive soul seeks.¹”

It is in appreciation of these words of Rav Kook, z'l, that I would like to discuss this morning what is going on in a far-away region of the Sudan called Darfur.

Let me begin by citing part of a powerful report by Nicholas Kristof in the February 9th issue of the *New York Review of Books*:

“During the Holocaust, the world looked the other way. Allied leaders turned down repeated pleas to bomb the Nazi extermination camps or the rail lines leading to them, and the slaughter attracted little attention. My newspaper, *The New York Times*, provided meticulous coverage of World War II, but of 24,000 front-page stories published in that period only six referred on page one directly to the Nazi assault on the Jewish population of Europe. Only afterward did many people mourn the death of Anne Frank, construct Holocaust museums, and vow: Never Again.

The same paralysis occurred as Rwandans were being slaughtered in 1994. Officials from Europe to the US to the UN headquarters all responded by temporizing and then, at most, by holding meetings. The only thing President Clinton did for Rwandan genocide victims was issue a magnificent apology after they were dead.

Much the same has been true of the Western response to the Armenian genocide of 1915, the Cambodian genocide of the 1970s, and the Bosnian massacres of the 1990s. In each case, we have wrung our hands afterward and offered the lame excuse that it

¹ Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook, manuscript cited in *Mishnato Shel HaRav Kook*, pp. 306-07.

all happened too fast, or that we didn't fully comprehend the carnage when it was still under way.

And now the same tragedy is unfolding in Darfur, but this time we don't even have any sort of excuse. In Darfur genocide is taking place in slow motion, and there is vast documentary proof of the atrocities.... [T]he latest proof comes in the form of two new books that tell the sorry tale of Darfur: it's appalling that the publishing industry manages to respond more quickly to genocide than the UN and world leaders do.

In my years as a journalist[, writes Kristof,] I thought I had seen a full kaleidoscope of horrors, from babies dying of malaria to Chinese troops shooting students to Indonesian mobs beheading people. But nothing prepared me for Darfur, where systematic murder, rape, and mutilation are taking place on a vast scale, based simply on the tribe of the victim. What I saw reminded me why people say that genocide is the worst evil of which human beings are capable.

On one of the first of my five visits to Darfur, I came across an oasis along the Chad border where several tens of thousands of people were sheltering under trees after being driven from their home villages by the Arab Janjaweed militia, which has been supported by the Sudan government in Khartoum. Under the first tree, I found a man who had been shot in the neck and the jaw; his brother, shot only in the foot, had carried him for forty-nine days to get to this oasis. Under the next tree was a widow whose parents had been killed and stuffed in the village well to poison the local water supply; then the Janjaweed had tracked down the rest of her family and killed her husband. Under the third tree was a four-year-old orphan girl carrying her one-year-old baby sister on her back; their parents had been killed. Under the fourth tree was a woman whose husband and children had been killed in front of her, and then she was gang-raped and left naked and mutilated in the desert.

Those were the people I met under just four adjacent trees. And in every direction, as far as I could see, were more trees and more victims—all with similar stories.”

Briefly, what is the background to this genocidal horror?

Darfur is a region in western Sudan, abutting Chad and the Central African Republic. It is about the size of Texas and has a population of 6 million; the majority are Muslim and have African features. Generally speaking, most people of African descent in Darfur are farmers, and most people of Arab descent in Darfur are nomadic herders. There is fierce competition for land between herders and farmers, including violent battles between fur farmers and Arab herders from 1987 to 1989. This competition has fueled the present conflict in Darfur.

For the first half of the twentieth century, present-day Sudan was a colony of the British Empire. Even as the Sudan achieved independence from Britain in 1956, civil war was already brewing between the north and the south.

Civil war was sparked in 1983 when the military regime tried to impose sharia law as part of its overall policy to “Islamicize” all of Sudan. Beginning in 1983, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) led insurrections in the south, a region dominated by Animists and Christians.

In 1989, compromise between the ruling government and southern opposition groups seemed imminent, but Omar al-Bashir, a politically and religiously extreme military leader, led a successful coup and became the chief of state, prime minister, and chief of the armed forces. Al-Bashir has been elected only once, in 1996. Al-Bashir continues to lead a government run by an alliance between the military junta and the National Congress Party, which pushes an Islamist agenda. In 1991, Sudan's government imposed a penal code that instituted amputations and stoning as punishments.

In 1996, terrorist threats led President Clinton to withdraw the U.S. ambassador to Sudan. There is still no U.S. ambassador in Khartoum, although the embassy remains open.

In early 2003, just as negotiations to end the civil war were progressing, a new rebellion spawned in the western province of Darfur when ethnically African rebel groups, including the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA), attacked military installations. The SLA's attack was rooted both in its belief that the government was neglecting Darfur and in its objections to the government's preference for hiring ethnic Arabs as top government officials.

The Sudanese government has enlisted Janjaweed — armed nomads from the north — to attack villages that ostensibly harbored rebels. Attacks usually follow a pattern: Government planes bomb villages in Darfur, then, within hours, Janjaweed ride in on horses or camels and rape and murder civilians.

A word from Kristof about the use of rape as a weapon:

“There has also been a growing appreciation in recent decades that crimes against humanity often include sexual violence, and that has been a central fact about the terror in Darfur. Indeed, the mass rapes in Darfur have been among the most effective means for the government to terrorize tribal populations, break their will, and drive them away. Rape is feared all the more in Darfur for two reasons. Most important, a woman who has been raped is ruined; in some cases, she is evicted by her family and forced to build her own hut and live there on her own. And not only is the woman shamed for life, but so is her entire extended family. The second reason is that the people in the region practice an extreme form of female genital cutting, called infibulation, in which a girl's vagina is sewn shut until marriage. Thus when an unmarried girl is raped, the act leads to additional painful physical injuries; and the risk of HIV transmission increases.

From the government's point of view, rape is a successful method of control because it sows terror among the victimized population, and yet it initially attracted relatively little attention from foreign observers, because women are too ashamed to complain. As a result, mass rape has been a routine feature of village attacks in every part of Darfur, and it hasn't yet gotten the attention it deserves.”

THE FACTS ABOUT THE DREADFUL DESTRUCTION

1. Estimates of the number of those murdered in Darfur range from 200,000 to 400,000.

2. What is clear is that there are more than two million refugees who have been forced to flee their farms and their land. Most are in camps in the Sudan.

People in the camps are dying of hunger and illness. At least 500 die daily and the mortality rate is rising.

U.N. food aid is running out. Poor security makes help less available. A huge catastrophe is looming.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

There are basically three goals and they all involve the United States and the U.N. — the U.S. because it has the wealth and the power to lead; the U.N. because it can provide troops for security and food and medicines for relief.

THE GOALS

1. HUMANITARIAN

Lobby for more money from the U.S. and U.N. for aid. President Bush has said the right things; now there must be action.

2. MILITARY

Lobby for a stronger peacekeeping force to stop the violence. Pressure the Sudanese government to stop supporting the Janjaweed atrocities.

3. DIPLOMATIC

Pressure the Sudanese government at every turn. At present, the so-called “Darfur Four” — Algeria, Pakistan, China, and Russia — have blocked the Security Council’s efforts to impose arms and oil embargoes. There is a simple reason: these four have major oil investments in the Sudan. China and Russia each get 10% of their oil from Sudan.

On April 30th, there will be a massive rally in Washington under an interfaith coalition. There must be a strong Jewish showing at this rally.

Kristof puts it poignantly when he writes:

[In the past, there was] international dithering as Armenians, Jews, Bosnians, and others were being slaughtered. [And now, the same thing is happening.] [T]he international response has been to debate whether the word “genocide” is really appropriate, to point out that the situation is immensely complex, to shrug that it’s horrifying but that there’s nothing much we can do. The slogan “Never Again” is being transformed into “One More Time.”

In January 1942, Judah Piltsch wrote these painful words in *Hadoar*:

והיה כי ישאלך בנך לאמר: מה עשית אתה?

Someday, our children will ask us: What did you do to prevent a further catastrophe for millions of innocent people in Darfur? What did you do to stop the murders, the rapes, the exile, and the starvation?

If the United States decides that this genocide is a priority, it can lead the world and stop it.

But in order for this to happen, Darfur has to become a priority for you and me. If it becomes that, and we show up in Washington on April 30th we will save hundreds of

thousands of innocent people and, in the process, we will be מקדש שם שמים
ברבים – we will sanctify God's name among the multitudes.

Yes! Darfur *is our* business!