



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

GENESIS > Bereishit

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Bereishit

**War In Israel: What We
Must Do**



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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ABSTRACT

As a wave of killings and stabbings sweeps across Israel, attacking innocent men and women, can any person of integrity stand on the sidelines ignoring these inhumane events? Can we hide behind the excuse that there is nothing we can do?

When Arabs roam Israeli streets wielding knives and screwdrivers to stab and kill any Jew they can target, rest assured the rest of the world is not far behind.

When Israel, the heart of the world, bleeds, the rest of the world body begins to weaken, bleeding as well.

What can we do to help the situation in Israel? What must we do to protect us all? How can one single person affect events across the globe?

The answer is in this week's Torah portion - the opening of Genesis, which we read as we begin the New Year following the rich holiday season.

This blunt sermon offers key talking points to guide and inspire your community with practical, actionable deeds to help mobilize them in these trying times for the Land of Israel and, its people, all of us the Children of Israel.

When Israel is at war, you and I shall join the ranks, herald the troops, and answer the call.

It is the only way to bring peace and light into the world.

WAR IN ISRAEL: WHAT WE MUST DO SPECIAL EDITION: ISRAEL IN CRISIS

1. Opening Words: Israel Bleeds

Behold, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps – Psalms 121:4

The eyes of G-d are upon it [the land of Israel] from the beginning of the year until the end of the year – Deuteronomy 11:12

As a wave of killings and stabbings sweeps across Israel, attacking innocent men and women, can any person of integrity stand on the sidelines ignoring these inhumane events? Can we hide behind the excuse that there is nothing we can do?

Basic decency dictates that we call out and act. You see, terror against one human being is terror against all of humanity.

Especially after witnessing the deafening silence of an indifferent world to the cries of 1.5 million Jewish children and 6 million Jews just 70 years ago...

Some may argue that why is this worse than all the other brutality taking place around the world. Why should Israel get more attention than other victimized nations?

And an even more outrageous argument is that Israel is (partially) to blame due to its treatment of the Arabs living in its territories.

Anyone making this claim is simply ignorant of history, willingly or unwillingly, or even worse: just plain anti-Semitic.

2. Global Issue

This is not just a Jewish issue. History bears the greatest testimony to the fact that an attack on Jews always leads to attack on all peoples.

Like the miners' canary, the Jewish people, for some reason (here is not the place to elaborate), are the first sensitive ones to bear the brunt of mans' cruelty and injustice, often in the most horrific forms.

No, murders and massacres of innocent Jews did not begin in 1948, or 1967 or 1981. They began long before Israel became a modern state and long before Jews controlled the land. Take the 1929 Chevron pogrom. Or the murder of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Tzoref in 1851, among the many other sacred Jewish martyrs (*kedoshim*) killed over the ages in the Holy Land, simply because they were... Jews.

When Arabs are roaming Israeli streets wielding knives and screwdrivers to stab and kill any Jew they target -- and no one protests -- rest assured, dictates history, that those knives are coming our way (G-d forbid). When innocent blood is flowing in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities -- and we don't react -- make no mistake: this is a war against us all as much as it is against the citizens of Israel.

Up until 9/11 -- September Eleventh 2001 -- the USA did not directly feel on its soil the full volcanic potency of the Middle East (perhaps a tremor or two, but not more). But then on that fateful Tuesday morning, those eruptions traveled thousands of miles and shook up this country and the entire world, waking everyone up to a reality that remains very much alive, continuing to spew its venomous lava (even after Bin-Laden's killing).

3. Denial Is Not An Option, Nor A Solution

Of course, we can choose to go into denial, but does anyone really think that what happened then was an anomaly? That the issues were resolved and we now have eliminated the threat of Islamist radicalism? Are the forces that brought on the terror back then any weaker today?

If anything, how many more children have grown since indoctrinated into believing that killing innocents is "moral" and "divine"?!

Just listen to some ex-terrorists, who describe in frightening detail how they were programmed from an early age to kill Jews and Westerners, and thereby be rewarded with heaven. As we speak millions of Muslim children are conditioned from a young age with a radical vision of a secular, Western world of infidels that must be destroyed and replaced with Islam. Martyrdom is deified. Children are brainwashed that the greatest thing they can do is give their lives for Islam against the infidels.

As much as we don't want to hear it, this *is* a profoundly religious and ideological war, deeply rooted in centuries-old beliefs and battles.

4. Our Obligation, Our Responsibility

Our obligation -- the responsibility of every single one of us, wherever in the world we may live -- is to come out with a loud and unambiguous voice declaring that the attack on one innocent person is an attack on all of us -- on our children and families.

We must unequivocally declare that we hold responsible not just the perpetrators, not just their leaders, but the entire Muslim world for allowing the creation of this breeding ground of terror. For tolerating this approach to remedy injustices.

I am afraid that the United States and the Western world are still as young as this 21st Century is, clueless (or worse) to the defining battle of our times -- one that will last long into this century, unless we mature quickly and face the task at hand. As the wise say: Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. The only way out is through.

And the task at hand is: to challenge the Muslim world to live up to the true Abrahamic principles of virtue and justice. To embrace a policy of zero tolerance for Muslims who defy these divine laws. To begin a new era of education and inspiration of their youth -- one that permeates their homes, schools and mosques -- how to honor the dignity of every and all human beings created in the Divine image, even if you may disagree with them.

Nations of the world must unite and demand of the Muslim world to embrace the principles established by Abraham, father of all nations, to promote the deepest values of virtue and integrity, all with love and inspiration. To fight the pagan forces of the universe, not with violence, but with spreading light and warmth.

Today's war must be waged with a powerful moral vision. It is not just a defensive war against terrorist attacks; it is an offensive battle for the ambitious vision of a world that will live in peace, while respecting the diversity of nations, cultures and faiths. We are fighting a war for a vision – first delivered at Sinai – which guided the Founding Father: That all people are created equal, with inalienable rights granted by virtue that we are all G-d's children.

Everyone has the right to practice and believe in their unique way. The enemy is anyone who breaches the universal and absolute law of hurting or killing another person; of denying and robbing any person of their fundamental, G-d given rights.

5. Israel Is At War: A Lesson From Genesis

Though there is no silver lining around this new wave of terror, it does illuminate for us the glaring fact -- which everyone wants to conveniently ignore -- that Israel is at war. Not just today or yesterday, but for the decades, indeed centuries if not millennia. Clarity is a great blessing, knowing thy enemy, even if it comes at a high price. Because when things are clear you cannot bury your head in the sand; you have no choice but to act.

A tremendous lesson from this week's Torah portion -- the beginning of the Genesis -- drives the point home about our personal responsibility for events happening in Israel today.

In this chapter we read perhaps the most famous story of all -- the creation of Adam and Eve, the first human beings, and their being placed in the Garden of Eden to "serve and protect" the divine laws of refining and elevating the universe.

Why was the human being created as an individual and singular entity, unlike all the other creatures and forces in the world which were created in batches as species? And why are we told about this individualistic creation of man?

Says the Mishne (Sanhedrin 37a):

Man was created alone, to teach thee that whosoever destroys a single soul he is [as guilty] as though he had destroyed a complete world; and whosoever preserves a single soul he is [as guilty] as though he had preserved a complete world... When one sheds the blood of another he is] responsible for his blood and the blood of his [potential] descendants until the end of time... Therefore every single person is obliged to say: the world was created for my sake.

"The world was created for my sake" meaning that despite the fact that there are millions and billions of other people, I am solely responsible for the life of another and for the universe as a whole!

Is there any more poignant statement describing the individual responsibility we each carry for another and for the world at large?

Most people today feel, frankly, insignificant. With over seven billion people on our planet, and an increasingly depersonalized life, the prevalent sentiment is that: "I don't matter that much. With so many people out there how can my one act possibly make any difference? Anything I do is like a paltry drop in a vast ocean."

That is why, at the beginning of the New Year, we read the story of Adam and Eve in the opening chapter of Genesis -- compelling each of us to ask: how would I lead my life if I were the only man or woman populating this world? Because each one of us is just like Adam and Eve, created as unique individuals, with total responsibility over our environment, as if no one else existed. Each of us needs to envision ourselves as Adam and Eve, carrying responsibility over the future of the world.

And if you are wondering: how can one action of a single person affect and change events at the other end of the universe? -- today we need not look further than basic physics (no need for faith) which teaches us

how every action has a reaction, how the most microscopic particle contains enormous energy and about the "butterfly effect," how a butterfly flapping its wings in Kansas City can create a typhoon in Singapore.

But long before modern physics, this week's Torah portion teaches us this message through the lens of the first human being -- a single creature carrying the responsibility of the entire universe.

When you personify Adam and Eve you become emboldened with the power to define your own destiny, instead of having others define it for you, and indeed shape the entire universe, instead of it shaping you.

Is there a more appropriate way to describe our -- each and every one of our -- responsibility for events in Israel today?

6. What Can We Do? Practical Actions

What then can each of us practically do?

We were thankfully blessed with the Torah which teaches us what each of us can do to help our brethren in Israel.

- Wage a spiritual war against all forces of moral apathy and ignorance. As mentioned above, take a firm and unwavering stand against any atrocity.
- Strengthen the three pillars which hold up world - both personal and global: Torah, Prayer, and Kind deeds.
- Intensify your commitment to Torah study - study a new text, and designate additional time to your study.
- Say additional prayers for the safety of people facing danger, especially for the Israeli police and Defense Forces.
- Give additional amounts of charity. Charity has a special energy to counter perilous situations.

- Engage your family and friends in meaningful dialogue. Reach out to your sphere of influence and inspire them with spiritual awareness. Encourage everyone to study Torah and add a new mitzvah – a good deed. The Bible tells us that through Torah study and performance of mitzvahs G-d promises: “You will dwell securely in your land. I will provide peace in the land. You will sleep without fear” (Leviticus 26:5-6)
- Initiate a gathering in your home or office, promoting additional goodness and kindness, especially in this year of Hakhel...
- Jewish men should be encouraged to put on Tefillin each weekday morning. Tefillin has faculties that add in protection in threatening times.
- Women and girls should be encouraged to light Shabbat and Holiday candles, 18 minutes before sundown leading into Shabbat or the Holiday. It is also customary to give some charity before lighting the candles.
- Encourage children to say holy verses and prayers and add in charitable and kind deeds. Children play a particular role in time of crisis. As the verse states, “out of the mouths of babes and sucklings You have established the strength...to destroy an enemy and avenger” (Psalms 8:3).

7. Hakhel: Rally and Gather the Troops

In addition to all of the above, we are now in a special year called the Year of Hakhel, a year of assembly or gathering. In the times of the Temple, every seventh year – the one following the Shemittah year – the mitzvah of Hakhel was preformed: “assemble the people: the men, the women, and the children” and the king of Israel should read portions of the Torah before all Israel, “in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear God and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah... all the days that you live.”

We recreate this gathering today by gathering together all the people, men, women and children to study Torah and commit to its precepts.

What better way is there to counter the forces that try to destroy and divide us? When any individual is being potentially hurt the greatest thing we can do is to assemble and unite together as one and reinforce our commitments to the living Torah, thereby drawing down G-d's power to protect and thwart any plots and conspiracies against us.

As we conclude our daily prayers:

Do not fear sudden terror, nor the destruction of the wicked when it comes. Contrive a scheme, but it will be foiled; conspire a plot, but it will not materialize, for God is with us. (Proverbs 3:25. Isaiah 8:10).

8. Closing Words: The Most Powerful Response (Conclusion)

The greatest and most powerful response to the terror around us is by doubling and tripling our effort in helping those around us. As much as you have done until now, go out of your way and lend your hand to another – financially, emotionally, spiritually – in whatever way possible.

Do something to save a life, and you save not just that life but the life of the entire universe.

Do not stand by as an observer on the sidelines. Act. Do your thing today to help another person. Add an additional mitzvah. Keep Shabbat and Kashrut. Light a Shabbat candle tonight before sundown. Study Torah. Pray. All people – commit to the universal Divine laws that transform this world into a holier place.

We are not victims or mere observers. Our actions matter now and forever.

Our blood boils when we hear about those that were silent during the Holocaust. When we will be asked one day: “What did you do about the tragic events happening around you?” what will your answer be?

I for one do not want to be left with no answer, or worse yet, an answer that I did nothing. I want to know that I did everything in my power. I hope you feel the same.

Let us create a true revolution. Let us reconnect to our Divine mission. Let us move heaven and earth with our actions. We have been promised that when we do, we will save the universe – literally.

May our actions honor the *Kedoshim* (sanctified ones) that were killed in Israel, Eitam and Naama Henkin, and all lives ripped away from us by terrorists in Israel and abroad. May they console their grieving families.

Hashem yinkom domom. May their blood cry out to heaven and earth and be avenged.

May we honor their lives by saving and helping lives around us.

Shabbat Shalom!

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