

PARSHAS VAYEIRA

תשפ"ד

Avimelech confronts Avrohom Ovinu for lying to him and not informing him that Soroh is actually his wife and not his sister. He is so upset that he took someone else's wife. He claims to be a very moral individual – he is the tzaddik! But his morality is severely twisted. Because the reality is that he is not such a big tzaddik after all. He kidnapped and nearly raped a woman! Even if she was unmarried, it was completely immoral. Furthermore, even after he knew the truth only a maloch prevented him from following through with his plan. Hashem says your hands are not clean – you must give Soroh back and Avrohom will daven for you. If you don't, I will kill you.

Contrast Avimelech's protestations of innocence with Pharaoh from last week's parsha. Pharaoh simply gives Soroh back – along with riches and his daughter – with no complaints of Avrohom's wrongdoing and no denial of guilt.

Avimelech accuses Avrohom of lying – as if this was worse than kidnapping and rape! Avrohom justifies his behavior with the following radical statement: It was because there is no yiras shomayim in this place, and if I don't lie and say she is my sister, I'll be killed for my wife. In essence, Avrohom Ovinu is saying if you don't have yiras shomayim, you can be rightly suspected of possibly committing murder!

Then Avrohom says this was his tactic of survival ever since he started his wanderings in following Hashem. Onkelos explains that when people began worshiping avodo zoro, Hashem brought me out of my father's house to worship only Him. And from that time onward, my life was in danger. Avrohom is the Ivri and this pitted him against the entire world. Deep down in the heart of every non-Jew, there is hatred of the Jews. Sometimes it comes out in the open and sometimes it is suppressed. But it is always there.

Avimelech was a king who set up his kingdom under the rule of a set of laws, and this created a stable social order. Certainly, murder was forbidden and punishable by death. But those laws were made up by Avimelech himself to serve his personal interests. He can change the laws when his personal interests require them to be changed. If the laws are not given by Hashem, who has absolute moral authority, the laws of morality can be twisted and adjusted to satisfy the whims and desires of the people who make them.

In Portland, during the George Floyd protests, there was absolute chaos and anarchy. Someone in the protest showed up wearing a MAGA cap and was gunned down in cold blood. There was an entire lecture given by a professor in philosophy from Brown University trying to justify the murder by saying this MAGA cap wearer was a fascist and deserved to be killed. The university leftists say it is moral to kill Jewish babies because of the occupation. This is because to them, there is no such thing as absolute morality. You begin with an emotion and you twist your brain into all kinds of pretzels to justify it.

But murder is murder and it is always wrong.

Germany produced the most famous philosophers of ethics and morality – Immanuel Kant and others. One of the greatest was Martin Heidegger. Hitler comes into power, and immediately, this philosopher of ethics finds a way to justify Hitler's killing of six million Jews. There are no absolutes. This is what Avrohom Ovinu warned. People justify doing whatever they want to do by changing the rules of morality to fit their needs. With their twisted minds, they will justify rape, kidnapping and murder as we see happening today right in front of our eyes.

But Avrohom is on the other side. He believed in absolutes with one God and one set of moral laws that apply to everyone at all times. And this is a dangerous idea which puts Avrohom in danger.

In the 19th century, there was a tremendous wave of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe – especially in Russia and the Ukraine. Without question, Ukrainians were the most vicious and bloodthirsty anti-Semites in the history of all Europe. The Jews were desperate to find a solution.

If you look at the seforim written by the Gedolei Yisroel of the time, they all say the same simple idea. They echo what Rav Chaim of Volozhin famously said: If the Jews don't make kiddush, then the non-Jews make havdoloh. The Netziv traced this phenomenon back to the golus of Egypt. What triggered the hatred of the Egyptians towards the Jews to make them want to persecute and enslave the Jews? It was the desire for Jews to be accepted and integrated into Egyptian society. They stopped doing bris miloh and immediately, the love of the Jews turned into hatred. Hashem didn't let that assimilation take place.

The Netziv explains the phrase of וְהָיָא שְׁעִמְדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלוֹנוּ in the Haggadah. What is the thing that allows us to survive? The answer is the continuation of the phrase: עֵלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ. What keeps Jews remaining as Jews and not assimilating is the very fact that the non-Jews reject us and try to destroy us in every generation.

Hashem says that Torah protects us and Shabbos protects. Mitzvos protect. We saw this very clearly during the invasion. Hashem wants achdus – despite the best efforts of the Left to sow division and discord in Israeli society – and this is how we will survive this tragedy. But at the same time, Hashem wants to wake us up to the fact that we are not accepted by the rest of the world. They don't want us to join American society or English society. One hundred thousand people marched in London in favor of killing Jews. Not just Israelis – Jews. In Australia, they marched chanting "Gas the Jews". How many would march to save Jews?

University campuses are openly supporting Hamas. Liberal, westernized Jews are waking up and realizing that all their efforts to be accepted and integrated have failed. They are being openly rejected and despised by the very people they so much wanted approval from.

We have to mentally dissociate ourselves from the Western ideology and its way of thinking. We have to understand and appreciate how Hashem sees the world and what He thinks is important. People who think it is more important to have soldiers out fighting than to have Jews learning in the beis midrash, don't know anything about Judaism. We need both. Soldiers who fight without people learning and davening for their success aren't worth anything. Our learning is enabling them to win their battles.

The Meshech Chochmoh writes about the cycle of assimilation throughout Jewish history. German Jews felt Berlin was Yerusholayim. The German Haskalah movement was at the forefront of the drive to assimilate into Western society, and as a result, the destruction of the Jews in Europe came out of the same place – Germany.

We certainly have to look at ourselves. We are a fractured society – splintered into religious and anti-religious factions. But we are not completely blameless. We have to examine ourselves and see to what degree we ourselves have adopted the Western outlook of הַנְּעוּצָה וְהַנְּעוּצָה – taking pride in the advanced military and technological power of

Israel and IDF.

How many of us thought – before October 7th – that our protection from enemies really comes from human efforts and not Divine intervention? We were caught so unprepared that it was unbelievable! The IDF didn't have enough food, uniforms, or even bullets, to supply the army's response to the attack. The IDF was so confident in their power of deterrence that they thought they had a surplus of tank shells. They sold them to other countries, and now they have to use tank shells from the 1970's because of the self-inflicted shortage. The U.S. are sending bullets because of the Israeli Army's hubris.

How many of us bought into this whole way of thinking?

Hashem is sending us a message. 350 student groups in Harvard University came out publicly as pro-Hamas. Frum people now are stopping to rethink their loyalties to these prestigious institutions. Jewish billionaires are pulling their money out of these universities. They are realizing that all their money and influence didn't buy them any acceptance. They now realize they are hated and despised by the university world they thought loved them and embraced them.

This hatred of Jews is what keeps us from assimilating and disappearing.

Avrohom Ovinu says his ideology of one God with absolutes of right and wrong put him in danger because the non-Jewish world prefers not to be constrained by these laws of absolute morality. Hitler said the exact same thing in his book, *Mein Kampf*. The Jews have to be destroyed because they brought to the world the idea of a conscience, of a concept of absolute right and wrong. Hitler and the Nazis believed the human being is an animal. The Jews tell us that human beings have a conscience and this idea doesn't allow us to live our lives as we want.

We have to get rid of them. As long as there is one Jew who survives, this idea will persist. We represent this idea, and the real source of their animus against us is Hashem Himself.

Avrohom says to Avimelech, stop your bluffing and your fake piety. You were willing to kill me to take my wife. You have no yiras shomayim and this means you are capable of anything. I am in danger because I represent the idea of Hashem dictating absolute morality.

When I would mention the Netziv and the Meshech Chochmoh in previous years, people thought I was over-reacting. Did I really think there could be a violent wave of anti-Semitism in America in today's progressive, Western world? But we see that in an instant, after 1,400 Jews were brutally murdered by Hamas, all the students of Harvard University came out in favor of the murderers! Hamas are in the right and Jews are in the wrong!

The BBC refuses to label Hamas as terrorists – they are only "militants". One of the main editors was confronted by someone who asked if he thinks the slitting of the throats of Jewish babies isn't terrorism. He responded with a giggle: "Not really". He was actually giggling at the thought of Jewish babies' throats being slit.

If there isn't yiras Hashem – who provides you with concepts of absolute right and wrong – you are capable of committing the worst atrocities and you will hate Jews.

Any Jew who tries to fit in and integrate into that culture will be pushed away and rejected. It is a cycle that is built into Jewish history. We have to be proud of who we are and our unique approach to life. Our connection to Hashem is what will save us from troubles. Not Biden, not the IDF – no-one other than Hashem.