

***Chukat: “The consequences of military defeat in biblical times –
A lesson for today?”***

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Our sidrah records the request of the Israelites to Sichon, King of the Amorites, to grant them freedom of passage through his territory while they were en route to Canaan. Not only was this refused, but Sihon then proceeded to enlist his entire citizenry to confront them. They were totally routed in the ensuing Battle, and Israel seized the entire Amorite land and settled it (see Nu. 21:21-31).

Already from biblical times, it was indisputable that a conquering army inherited its enemy's territory. In Graeco-Roman times, defeated nations lost their independence and became client states or provinces of the victors' empires. This situation continued throughout the Middle Ages and into modern times and included the imposition of heavy reparations in order to weaken the defeated nation's economy and make it almost impossible for them to rearm. Thus, the allies assumed the right to drastically redraw the map of Europe following both the first and second world wars, with borders redefined, empires disbanded, and new countries established in their place. In The Treaty of Versailles (1919), Germany had to accept not only loss of territory, disarmament, and payment of substantial reparations, but also what was referred to as 'The War Guilt Clause,' accepting full responsibility for the war.

The current Hamas refusal to surrender, lay down their arms, accept a hostage deal, and end the war, betrays their embrace of a death cult, and their total indifference to the loss of the lives of their own people if, at the same time, Jewish blood can be spilt. For Hamas and Iran, that is a prize worth sacrificing for! For Jews, with their Judaic sensibilities and Western cultural values, that is anathema.

Nothing, but nothing, justifies indiscriminate terrorist attacks on innocent people. The argument is specious that Israel's political intransigence and refusal to countenance a two-state solution was responsible for Hamas's Iranian-backed massacre of 1200 innocent and unarmed Israelis, in a frenzy of rape, the burning alive of whole families, and the seizure of over 250 hostages.

Such a reading of the situation is as false as it is naïve. For, had Hamas's goal been the establishment of a Palestinian state, to ameliorate their citizens' condition, restore their self-respect, and realise their national aspirations, they would hardly have reduced them to desperation, keeping them in a state of virtual servitude and abject poverty, using the vast sums received from Iran to line the pockets of their leaders, endangering the lives of children by placing them in the way of rocket launchers, and stockpiling weapons and explosive materials in their hospitals, schools, nurseries, homes, and mosques.

Should the Palestinian desperation argument be used as a justification for the Hamas atrocity, let us not forget – and constantly remind Israel's critics – that, since 1947, Israel has agreed many times to a partition plan that would give the Arabs a state of their own. Each time, this was

rejected as it did not bring about the realization of the Palestinian dream of sweeping the Jews into the sea.

At the Camp David Summit of 2000, a former Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, offered to accept almost every demand of Yasser Arafat, including that of a Palestinian state encompassing most of the Gaza Strip and 95% of the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The response to that was the Intifada! In September 2008, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made a further overture to the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, which was again rebuffed.

The Palestinians' rejectionist philosophy leaves no doubt that jihadi terrorism is a religious imperative that must be pursued until Jews and their state no longer exist, and that peace deals may only be considered as part of a temporary political deception. That this is an article of the Muslim faith is clearly enunciated by the author of a recent English translation of the authoritative, 12th-century *Tafsir-al-Kabir* commentary on the Quran by the Iranian theologian, Fakhruddin Razi.¹ And Israel's post-Holocaust response to that, must be, "Never Again!"

If, God forbid, Israel was ever to capitulate to the Islamic extremists' onslaught, capitalism would be next in line. And once capitalism was brought to its knees, it would be Christianity and Western values. And finally, it would be democracy. Only the naïve would imagine that Israel is the sole cause of the worldwide terrorist movement. But the time for naiveté is now at an end. The civilised world may now have its last chance to make life safer for itself and for posterity. And it is not just terrorism that must be outlawed, but also inflammatory words that constitute an incitement to terrorism – the sort of inflammatory words that are uttered to whip up fanaticism,

hatred, and violence in Arabic language broadcasts and newspapers, preached in mosques across the world, and taught to impressionable little children. The sort of inflammatory and racist words that, for decades, have been bandied about in UN circles, such as at the infamous Durban Conference of 2001 which equated Zionism with racism and implanted the notion of Israel as a pariah state in the international mind.

Alas, some Jewish factions in Israel have also not been blameless in this regard. We recall that the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was, in many ways, the culmination of a campaign of vilification and de-legitimization, and his having been branded a *rodef*, a pursuer, whose life it was lawful to terminate. Such religious extremism created a climate in which a Yigal Amir could thrive.

How ill-considered is the ditty we used to chant as children when someone insulted us – “Sticks and stones may break my bones, *but words can never hurt me.*” The truth is that words can so easily be converted into missiles of hate, mayhem, and violence.

Our Siddur reminds us that peace will only come about when men speak its language and cease to vilify and dehumanize. And hence the juxtaposition of the last two compositions of the Amidah, *Sim shalom* – the petition for peace – followed by *Elohai netzor*:

*My God! Guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceit,
and to those that curse me, let my soul remain silent...*

We pray fervently that courage will prevail, that Israel's victory over Iran and its proxies will be permanent and effective, that the enemies that plan our destruction will be wholly and permanently neutralized, and that the resolve of enlightened nations will never waver, so that the words of Isaiah may be fulfilled: *Chazku yadayim rafot, uvirkayim koshlot ammeitzu* –

*O, strengthen the slack hands
And make firm the tottering knees.
Say to the anxious of heart,
“Be strong, fear not.
For your God comes with vengeance
And with dread retribution
To give you triumph...
Enabling those He has ransomed
And those He has redeemed to return home
To enter Zion with shouts of triumph,
Crowned with everlasting joy.
Gladness and joy shall be their escort,
And suffering and weariness
Shall forever vanish (Isaiah 35:3-4; 10).*

May we merit speedily to witness the fulfilment of those words,

V'chein yehi ratzon, v'nomar amen.

NOTES

1. See [www.alhakam.org/what does the Quran say about Israel and Palestine?](http://www.alhakam.org/what%20does%20the%20Quran%20say%20about%20Israel%20and%20Palestine%3F) Accessed 2/07/2025.

**Shabbat shalom,
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