

Temple Shabbat Shalom

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Purim, Politics, and Remembering Not to Forget

On the Shabbat before Purim we always return to the irrational hatred of our enemies as exemplified by the Amalekites. The Amalekites, as you remember, are the first terrorists of history. The Amalekites attacked the children of Israel as they wandered towards their holy land after the first Exodus. Amalekites kill civilians. We are commanded to remember not to forget the spirit of Amalek in history. The traditional prophetic reading is the story of King Saul, the Prophet Samuel, and the Amalekite's King Agog. The King puts the Amalekites to the sword and the prophet finishes off Agog, and still the spirit of Amalek lives on. (I Samuel (15:1-14). The story leaves the reader a bit "agog". Similarly the war in Iraq seems a reenactment, as Saddam is gone but terror is everywhere. Tyranny transcends the tyrant.

History reveals a narrative every bit as absurd as a Purim pageant. Presidents and Premiers justify wars against enemies as holy and just wars and all this in the name of God. President Bush declared a Crusade against Jihad after the 9/11 attacks.

Today's ruler of Persia, in the spirit of Amalek, irrationally hates everything Israelite. He proclaims a holy war against Israel and every Jew.

One grows weary of all this. How does one respond to a Jihad against Judaism? If moderns are Amalekites, is an armed response commanded by our tradition also? We walk through this mine and mind field with great caution and trepidation.

Passover promises redemption, which includes prosperity and an end to war. We enter Passover via Purim. Purim is the time to study the role of Amalek in history. In every generation tyrants arise to destroy our people.

We will discuss the holy war, crusade, just war and justification of war. We challenge all to rethink their relationship to "Holy Scripture" "Holy War" and proof texting.

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Purim begins at sundown on March 20th

Passover begins at sundown April 19th

We will see that the holy war is a double edged sword.

We redefine the Holy War.

Not all wars are holy.

The Crusades were the least holy wars in history.

Just war theory, even in international law, is often a mechanism of justification of war.

These are Holy Wars:

The War against disease.

The War against poverty.

The War against fundamentalists who pervert fundamentals.

But the greatest holy war is against ignorance.

Our first battle this moment is to discuss the “Holy War” idea.

Is it possible to utter the words holy and war in one breath without defiling the mouth of the speaker?

We struggle to understand the Jihad. The jihad is not a holy war. The Lesser Jihad is armed struggle. The Greater Jihad is our struggle with our own inner demons. Defeated in the Greater Jihad some Muslim leaders declare an unjust jihad against the modern world. Fundamentalists violate fundamentals, the basic teachings of religions. To wage the greatest holy war, against ignorance, we discuss the holy war and jihad traditions as they originate in the Torah and manifest in Christendom.

The Biblical Command to exterminate the native inhabitants of Israel opens the Torah to the charge of teaching a Holy War. In truth the war sermons in the Book of Deuteronomy are a scandal. Many scholars are hypnotized into a condemnation of the teachings of Torah by being ignorant of the Rabbinic understanding of the conquest of Israel.

Judaism today is the religion of the discussion of the meaning of scripture as first recorded in the Talmud, the basis of the Oral Law. The Oral Law is also a Written Law but remains oral as long as its understanding of the written is discussed.

Knowing the Talmud alone also does not define the Jewish position on an issue. If Satan were really shrewd, he would quote the Talmud, since everything is in it, pro and con, on most topics. The abuse of Talmudic concepts is clear when a Prime Minister is assassinated based on proof-texting from its pages.

“Holy” is not the most precise term in describing Israel’s wars of religion. Combatants were expected to be holy, maintaining a state of ritual cleanliness, even carrying a paddle to bury their excrement.

Joshua's conquest of the land is best understood in the broader context of the Covenant. The legal relationship between God and Israel includes an understanding that Israel will worship God alone and that God will grant favor and protection to his people. The Promise and the Land walk hand in hand.

This same land is the focus of the holy wars of Christianity and Islam. Spiritual title to the land passes to Christendom since they are now the chosen, according to replacement theology. This sword becomes double edged when Islam proclaims a scripture that is a Final Testament, superseding the New Testament.

The Crusades, many scholars argue, were unjust and not holy. They inspired a Muslim response of jihad to defend lands they called home.

The Knights of the Roundtable certainly considered their attack on Jerusalem justified.

The theological conundrum of "Just War" is an attempt by the different faith groups to justify whatever war is on the drawing board. Just wars are in theory an attempt to define the justice of a war, which ironically may be just another war. Just war theory is often just nonsense. Holy Wars are more often than not, not holy.

Does the Torah have a just war doctrine? The Rabbis assume that wars may be waged with justice if competent judgments are given by the leader, the Sanhedrin and the divine oracle the Urim and Tumim. This understanding helps civilize the biblical holy war since a war sanctioned by Torah must be evaluated by principles of law. The danger, of course, is those in power always seek justification. Even the legal process may baptize a war that has nothing to do with justice. Still, in the history of international law, we acknowledge that the Rabbis and later Lawyers view force as a disciplined instrument of Law.

Political and religious leaders seek a right to war theory. Rather than restrain violence the scriptural and legal sources are quoted to justify violence. We return to the sources in an attempt to invert this process.

The very first comment on the first verse of the Torah by our great exegete Rashi is a justification of the idea of A Promised Land.

Why do we begin with a description of the creation of heaven and earth?

Rashi answers: To teach that the God who creates has the right to give title of a portion of the world to one people. This title, in theory is not passed on to those who have possession of the land, whether Christian or Muslim. The Torah is ordered, the Rabbis argue, to specifically guarantee a response to the charge in open court that the Jews robbed the land from native inhabitants.

Those who believe the "New" replaces the "Old" covenant are not impressed with this argument. If The Quran is in fact the Final Testament its reading of Genesis is authoritative. If possession guarantees the Promise, then the Temple Mount is Islam's and the remainder of Jerusalem Jewish.

This raises the question of the Third Temple and the future of Jerusalem a separate discussion.

Quotes from Torah, Gospels or Quran do not have the last word.

Proof Texting Proves Nothing

Turning to the Twentieth Chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy we learn that prooftexting often proves nothing. This war sermon begins with priestly admonitions not to be fearful in battle. A logical disconnect follows, if this is the script for the conquest, since soldiers are allowed to return “home” if they just planted a vineyard or built a new home.

The key verse is number ten which more often than not is mistranslated.

“When you approach a city to wage war against it you must first call out “Shalom” If the city responds peacefully, and opens its gates to you all the people inside shall become your subjects and serve you.” Shalom here means submission more than Peace.”

Did Muhammad O.B.M. have a copy of the Deuteronomy scroll? Scholars admit they do not know. What is clear is the similarity to the Jihad of Islam.

The Rabbis did not consider Chapter Twenty of Deuteronomy the work of redactors in the future. For scholars “Reflection” means the reinterpretation of biblical sources within a historosophy serving a theological doctrine, in our case, the “Holy War”. Deuteronomy Twenty is law and sermon not history.

Our Rabbis of blessed memory also have their own reflection on this text. Just as Moses sued for Peace before his battle with the Amorites (Deut 2:26) his disciple sues for Shalom before the conquest. Joshua the bandit becomes Joshua the diplomat. Our Rabbis teach that Joshua sent out three proclamations of Shalom even though we find not a hint of this in the unadorned text.

We note that a Midrashic reflection on the text may be closer to the facts of the historical conquest than the Book of Joshua. In other words Rabbinic Judaism understands the literal description of the conquest as the reflection of a sermon to prove God fights with his people. The conquest was not a blitzkrieg of foot soldiers triumphing over the chariots (tank corps) of the native inhabitants. The archeological evidence also argues for a more gradual and assimilationist settlement. In fact the assimilation was so complete that it becomes difficult to distinguish between Canaanite idolaters and Israelite idolaters as biblical history unfolds. In the future, when we violate the Covenant and break the Promise we are exiled from the Land. In our time we all bow to the idols of power and fundamentalism and the holy war idea in each of our traditions.

The Greater Holy War of the Torah is spiritually waged against the Seven Deadly Sins. Our first holy land is our body. The greater holy war is our inner struggle with our inclinations to do evil. This is Amalek.

The true Grail is a Cup that sanctifies Peace and the greater crusade is now against our persistent failure to create a politics of Peace.

I pray Islam triumph in the struggle that is a surrendering to Peace.

Remember the greatest holy war.

A Thought Provoking Purim.

We are looking forward to your response.

Happy Holidays,

Rabbi Aryeh and Karen

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If you are interested in accessing any of the Holiday Seders (including Purim and Passover) go to our website (Rabbiweddings.com) and click on Temple Shabbat Shalom.

Feed the Body and the Soul

Hamantashen recipe (We thank Rebecca Sanborn)

Ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/8 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup vegetable shortening or butter
1 cup sugar
1 large egg
2 teaspoons packed finely grated fresh orange zest
1 tablespoon fresh orange juice
2/3 cup filling such as [Date Orange Filling](#), [Apple Raisin Filling](#), prune lekvar, poppy-seed filling, or apricot or cherry jam

Preparation

Into a bowl sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. In another bowl with an electric mixer beat shortening, sugar, and egg at medium speed until light and fluffy. Add zest and juice and beat until incorporated. Add flour mixture, stirring, until a smooth dough is formed. Gather dough into a ball and flatten into a disk. Chill dough, wrapped in plastic wrap, at least 3 hours and up to 2 days.

Preheat oven to 375° F.

Halve dough. On a lightly floured surface roll out half of dough (keeping other half wrapped and chilled) 1/4 inch thick. With a 3-inch cutter cut out as many rounds as possible. Transfer rounds with a metal spatula to a large baking sheet, arranging about 1/2 inch apart. Reroll scraps and cut out more rounds. Put 1 teaspoon filling in center of each round and fold up edges to form triangular cookies resembling a tricorned hat, pinching corners together and leaving filling exposed. (Pinch dough tightly enough so seams are no longer visible and sides are taut enough to prevent cookies from leaking filling as they bake.)

Bake hamantaschen in middle of oven 20 minutes, or until pale golden. Cool hamantaschen on baking sheet 5 minutes and transfer to racks to cool completely. Make more hamantaschen with remaining dough and filling in same manner. Hamantaschen keep in an airtight container at room temperature 5 days.

We regret to have to inform you of the passing of Brian Reagan. Brian was a loving husband, father and son and sibling and our friend and congregant. He will be greatly missed. He lived his short life to the fullest. Our prayers are with his loving family.

The Reagan Family has made a generous donation in Brian's memory

Simcha's- Mazel Tov and Prayers

A Special Thank-you for generous donations and continuing membership

A very special Thank you to Bill and Julia Reagan for the donation of our Torah and their continual support. Thank you for the generous donation in memory of Brian.

Ron and Liz Tickman for their generous donation and constant support

Irv and Dorothy Goldman for their donation

Please send special *Mishaberach* prayers for good health

Janice Rothenberg

Mazel Tov to our Newest Bundles of Joy

Gary and Barb Tickman on the birth of their granddaughter Lilianna on February 21

Joshua and Kim Lipshultz on the birth of their daughter Hanna in July

Roger and Laura Thompson on the birth of Jesse Noah February 17

Newest Congregants

David Sternberg & Melissa Mansir

Brian Schlaks & Dawn Pearce

Solomon Winternitz & Elizabeth Petraso

Anne Hankey & Randy Forman

Matthew Wiener & Kathleen Zaleski

Karen Golan & Sanjay Begaria

Jason Jensen & Rachel Stecker

David Makler & Allysa Mosuch

David Leeds & Alison Reno

Happy Anniversary

Joshua and Laura January 1

Amanda and Brian January 18

Sean and Inga February 18

Dina and Steven February 24

Rebecca and Eric March 17

Joshua and Laura March 31

Jolie and Bob April 2

Brice and Beth April April 17

Jim and Sandra April 24

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