

**SHABBAT SERMON**  
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*“Terrorists in our Midst”*

Let me describe the scene ... it is a very real one. It actually happened last week. Yes, thousands of miles away but one that affects all of us. It is one family – an innocent family – numbering close to 20 people, three men and the rest women and children. They are surrounded by a few dozen masked men who have invaded their home and say they are going to lynch them. First, the masked men set fire to their laundry in the front yard and then they go to set fire to one of the rooms in the house. The women start crying for help but the neighbors are too scared to do anything because armed men have surrounded the house. The windows are shattered, flames engulf one of the entrances to the home, there are hundreds of by-standers witnessing the scene ... sometimes even offering suggestions and encouragement to the gunmen.

That was the scene. Now the question: where did it take place? Who were the masked gunmen? Who were the victims whose home had been invaded? The answers? The scene I just described took place last week in Hebron. The people in their home – men, women and children – were Arabs. The gunmen who had invaded their home, threatening to kill them were Jews. Jews who were being encouraged by other Jews who live in Hebron; a bitterly divided city in Judea.

The events I just described took place as Israeli police and soldiers evacuated a home occupied by settlers in Hebron. The police and soldiers were acting by orders of the government, which in turn was acting by order of the Supreme Court. But there are Jews living in Hebron and across the West Bank who do not accept the decisions of Israel’s Supreme Court or of its government leaders. Many of these Jews are youth encouraged by their parents, and sometimes by their rabbis. And so, when the evacuation took place, these Jews went on the rampage that I just described.

Now you tell me: when such scenes have happened to Jews in the past, the word to describe it was a “pogrom.” What word should we use when it is perpetrated by Jews? There is only one word: a “pogrom.” In the past when the masked gunmen were Arabs threatening to kill Jews, what did we call the assailants? “Terrorists.” So what should we call Jews who similarly threaten people? There is only one word: “Terrorists.” The terrorists who attacked in Mumbai were members of a terrorist organization called Lashkar-E-Taiba, whose name means “the army of the pure.” But that’s a lie! They are as impure as they come! The settlers who took over a home in Hebron under questionable circumstances, spurring confrontations with the Israeli government and with the local Arabs, called the home “Beit Ha-Shalom – House of Peace.” But that was a lie! As one of them clearly indicated in the graffiti he wrote on a wall which said: “There will be war over the House of Peace.”

To make matters even worse, what happened in Hebron is nothing new. Because they believe that they are fulfilling the will of God, these same Jewish terrorists have thrown stones at Israeli police and soldiers. They have uprooted the olive trees of Arabs, attacked Arab women and old people, have vandalized mosques and Muslim cemeteries ... all this by *Yiddishe kinder*.

What is happening now is a repeat of what happened when our ancestors were in Egypt. During our Egyptian enslavement the Torah tells us: *Vayarehu otanu ha-mitzrim* which on a simple level means, “The Egyptians were bad to us.” But our sages read it as telling us: “And the Egyptians made us bad.” Having lived with them and experienced their behavior, we became like them ... we descended to their level. Today, there is a group among our people who are on the verge of becoming just like them! I know you will say: It’s not all of us ... it’s just a few, a handful of disgruntled people who, in the name of God, are doing the most horrendous things that go against their religion. You can say that, but do you accept those explanations when they are offered on behalf of Muslim terrorists ... that it’s not the religion and it’s not the multitude ... it’s just a few?

And of course you can say that the actions of these few, as bad as they are, can’t compare to the indiscriminate killing that Muslim terrorists have perpetrated, but at the same time let’s remember that these Jewish terrorists, when stopped by the police and Israeli army, refer to them as Nazis. They are the ones saying: Jews are as bad as our worst enemies.

And one thing more ... three weeks ago we had a wonderful experience here when we had a discussion with Imam Earl El-Amin, who presented a fascinating talk on Islam as he lives it, and as he preaches it. But many of us questioned amongst ourselves: why don’t we hear more of these Muslim voices condemning the actions of their fellow Muslims?

And so I ask you today: why haven’t we heard more voices of Jews – rabbis, Jewish leaders – condemning the actions of these Jewish terrorists; actions that go against the law of the state of Israel, the army of the state of Israel ... actions that go against the law of the Torah and of the people of Israel? Bad enough that in their midst there are some rabbis who defend their behavior, and perhaps even encourage their behavior. I’m not talking about them ... I’m talking here in the U.S. – where have the leaders of the Zionist organizations been? Where have the leaders of Orthodox organizations – the Orthodox Union, the Young Israel, the Agudah – been when the actions of these terrorists bring nothing but shame on our people and play into the hands of our enemies and threaten to divide and cause a civil war in Israel.

The only voice of condemnation that I heard came from the National Council of Young Israel, whose President made the following proclamation the day after the pogrom took place. He said, “The unfortunate events that occurred this week in the holy city of Hebron were as much distressing as they were disturbing. Watching Jews forcibly remove their Jewish brothers and sisters from their home and community was a painful reminder of the Israeli government’s lack of understanding and compassion towards their own.” Do you get it? The Young Israel is condemning not the terrorists, but the government ... not those who take the law into their own hands, but the Supreme Court of the state – they’re the ones at fault!

Have we lost our minds? No, I don't think it's that ... it is more that we're in danger of losing our souls ... our Jewish souls. I believe that Jews have a historic right to every inch of the land of Israel. I believe that Jews should be able to live in Hebron just as Arabs are able to live in Tel Aviv. But the battles we are talking about now are not over the land of Israel, they are over the state of Israel ... the *state* of the state of Israel. Are we going to be what we are meant to be: an *ohr lagoyim* – a light unto the nations? Or are we going to be “just like them?”

The answer is found in an incident in this morning's Torah portion. It is one of the more unfortunate incidents in the Bible where we are told that Dina, the only daughter of Jacob, was taken by Shechem, the leader of a local tribe. Her brothers, Shimon and Levi, in retaliation, tell Shechem's people that if they circumcise themselves their sister can stay with them. And thus, they do. And on the third day of their circumcision Shimon and Levi go and kill all the men of the tribe. Was what they did justifiable? There are those who defend them, but not their father! Many years later when father Jacob is on his death bed, he gives blessings to his children. And the blessing he gives to Shimon and Levi is not much of a blessing when he says to them, “Shimon and Levi are brethren, stolen tools are their weapons. Let my soul not come into their council, unto their assembly let my glory not be united ... curse thee their anger for it is fierce and their wrath it was cruel.” That's the way a Jewish leader speaks when Jews take the law into their own hands; that's the way a Jewish leader speaks about acts of terrorism when perpetrated by Jews. Even if the Jews are his own children! On the words “stolen tools are their weapons,” the Biblical commentator Rashi points out, “This craft of murder is in their possession by theft. *Mibirkas Esav hi zo* – it is from the blessing of Esau, *U'monas shelo hi* – it is his craft and you robbed it from him.” Do you hear what Jacob is telling Shimon and Levi? Their actions are not the way of the Jewish people, their actions are the way of Esav. And Rashi goes on to tell us that when Jacob said: “Shimon and Levi are brethren,” he was saying to them that they are of one mind in the way they dealt with Shechem, and in the way they dealt with Joseph. You see, before Joseph was thrown into a pit, the Torah tells us, “And one man said to his brother, ‘Come let us kill him.’ It doesn't say which two of the brothers were the ones who said: Let's kill him. But Rashi is saying here that it was Shimon and Levi. He says this by way of deduction, but one commentator pointed out: how did Rashi know that Shimon and Levi were the ones who were prepared to kill their brother? Because they were the ones who killed the people of Shechem ... and people who are so ready to kill others will eventually turn on their own.

Next week we usher in the festival of Chanukah. The festival of Chanukah is the one Jewish holiday that clearly celebrates a military victory. And yet, it is during that very festival that our sages have us recite a Haftorah that includes the immortal words, “*Lo b'chayil v'lo b'koach ki im b'ruchi omar Hashem tz'vaos* – not by might nor by power but by My spirit sayeth the Lord of hosts.” That is the way – the real Jewish way.

We, as Jews, must make sure these days that we have not lost our way. We must raise our voices against those who threaten us from without ... and also against those who threaten us from within. It is the responsibility of all of us to live up to the Biblical mandate: “*V'asita hayasher v'hatov b'einei Hashem* – that we do what is proper and good in the eyes of God.” Amen.