



Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

NO HAVEN FOR TERROR

One of the most remarkable stories in the Bible is the death bed scene of King David. The aged monarch, ready to hand over the rule of his Kingdom, speaks to his son, the future King Solomon, about what Solomon ought to do after David has died. Trained as we are to expect the Bible to reflect love, forgiveness, and compassion, it is shocking to read what David actually tells his son. Rather than instructing Solomon to start with a clean slate, to forgive everybody, to forget the wrongs that have been done to the monarchy, King David recounts a laundry list of those people who have offended the monarchy and harmed the nation. He bids his son to see that they don't escape retribution.

As shocking as David's brutality may be in our soft and forgiving world, King David is teaching us something about living with reality. His statesmanship is not for the world as we would like it to be, not for a world in which all people are committed to the very highest expressions of morality and decency. But rather, King David worked with a world much like our own. This is a world in which people will murder another person because they want to make a political statement, in which terrorists will explode a bomb in public because they oppose policy in another part of the world, in which fanatics will push a man in wheelchair off of a cruise liner in the open seas to make a statement. In such a world compassion is no substitute for swift and simple justice. And compassion that precludes the execution of justice ultimately winds up being no compassion at all. We see that hard reality in President Clinton's bold attempt to make it clear that there is no haven for terrorism. Wherever in the world perpetrators of violence seek to hide, they will be found and they will be stopped. Too many innocents has been butchered to allow an idolatrous notion of national sovereignty to prevent us from being able to stop future acts of terrorism.

Indeed, the argument of national sovereignty fails, both on moral and legal grounds. In international law it is clear that national sovereignty does not confer upon a country the right to harbor aggressors against another country. The responsibility for preventing acts of aggression lies with the hosts of the would-be terrorists; to refuse to restrain the terror is itself an act of aggression. Therefore, if Sudan does not want to be attacked by outside forces, it needs to guarantee that Sudan won't been the base for terrorists to develop chemical weapons. Afghanistan needs to guarantee that it will not be the base from which zealots will launch their attacks. Failing willingness and a resolve on the part

of Sudan or of Afghanistan to stop terrorists from using their soil as a base, it is not a violation of international law to do what these feeble hosts won't do themselves. But the moral issue that undergirds international law is no less clear: all of us as human beings have a mandate to fight the random assault against other human beings. In a world in which some people are willing to assault the divine image of their fellow human being, when there are terrorists willing to violate "Thou Shalt Not Murder" for the sake of a PR moment, then the democracies must show no less resolve. The democracies of the world must be willing to use force to stop terror.

The Rabbis of the Talmud had it right. They said that "those who would be kind to the cruel ultimately will be cruel to the kind." In a world in which terrorists are willing to exploit innocent people for the sake of their politics, to prevent bringing them to justice would be the greatest injustice of all.

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