

SUICIDE MOMS

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

For the last seven years, I have patterned this d'var Torah in a standard way. I quote a verse, ask a question and then relate a story. I then conclude by explaining my answer to the Biblical question, hoping that the story I related has some enlightening or plausible connection.

In the topsy-turvy world we live in, I'd like to do something different this week. I'd like to relate a few stories first, ask a question on the almost incomprehensible stories, and then relate a verse from the Torah, with the hope that the Torah's prescience will help us to in some way understand them.

Hussein Nasr was a failed suicide bomber. He plowed an explosive-laden truck into an Israel army post. He wanted to kill himself along with as many Israeli soldiers as possible. He was only partially successful in his mission, as the only one blown to bits by his evil scheme was he himself.

Like proud relatives filming a family simcha (happy occasion), the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) took a video of his truck plowing into the Israeli post. Until Nasr's 71-year-old father, Hassan, heard of his son's actions, he said that he had no idea his son belonged to Hamas. But when he heard about the attack on Israeli radio, he declared, "I am proud of him. The whole world is proud of him. Even the land is proud of him here," he said.

Here's another story, that defines a new level ofchutzpah.

The proud mother of Iman Atalalla, who killed Israeli soldiers by detonating a bomb-laden car, submitted forms requesting welfare payments of \$150 a month through the Islamic Rescue Committee -- regarded in Israel as a Hamas fund-raising group. On the welfare application, the bomber's family wrote: "Died: September 12 1993; Place: Gaza; Circumstances of incident: suicide mission in booby-trapped car."

The terrorist was single, aged 20, and came from a family of nine. The family called Atalalla "polite and moral," and said he "fasted Mondays and Thursdays, prayed and read Koran." Describing his attack that killed two Israeli soldiers, the report said: "When 'his prey' approached he switched on the ignition, approached the enemy's vehicle and set off explosives, which sent a male and female soldier to [their deaths, and] the shahid (martyr) went to Paradise."

Finally, from The New York Times this past Sunday, 10/21/2001:

"I named my son Osama, because I want to make him a mujahid. Right now there is war, but he is

a child. When he is a young man, there might be war again, and I will prepare him for that war. I will sacrifice my son, and I don't care if he is my most beloved thing. For all of my six sons, I wanted them to be mujahedeen. If they get killed it is nothing. This world is very short."

The question is simple. Where does such moral depravity come from? How is it possible that parents consider their progeny heroes for blowing themselves up while killing others? How is it humanly possible for a mother and a father to be proud parents of monsters?

In this week's portion, Hagar, Avram's maidservant, is driven from his home by Avram's wife, Sara. As Hagar wanders the desert, she is found by an angel who approaches her at a wellspring.

The angel prophesies, "Behold, you will conceive, and give birth to a son; you shall name him Ishmael, for Hashem has heard your prayer. And he shall be a wild man - his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and over all his brothers shall he dwell." (Genesis 16:11-12) Powerful words. Predictions of a fate that dooms Ishmael to a violent life, one that the commentaries interpret as "Ishmael being a highwayman and bandit, everyone will hate him, fear him, and battle him." Yet Hagar's response to this bestowing is as incomprehensibly baffling. She lauds the angel and "she called the Name of Hashem Who spoke to her 'You are the G-d of Vision.'" (Genesis 16:13).

Imagine. Hagar is told that her son will be a wild man who attacks and terrorizes, yet she does not protest nor pray that his fate should be altered. Rather, she responds with praise and exaltation for a "G-d of Vision." It sounds like she is content, even proud, and frankly I just don't get it. And though I'm clueless about Hagar's attitude, perhaps now I know why so many of her descendants don't think much differently.

It is obvious that not all of them do, of course. Everyone controls his or her own destiny. But maybe there is a national predisposition to violence. Maybe these parents are genetically infused with pride, knowing that the promise to their forebear has borne its rotten fruit. The values imparted from a nomadic matriarch have been transmitted like a deadly virus to her grandchildren, and Hagar's satisfaction is now theirs.

So this misplaced pride is not a new story. It's 3000 years old. And if you don't believe me, you can look it up.

This week's e-mail Drasha is dedicated in memory of Rav Michael Ben Eliezer Fuld Z"L, who passed away on 7 MarCheshvan 5755, who brought his sons closer to Torah by being an excellent example and treating them to a wonderful education at the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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