# Standing Tall and Strong for Israel and the Jewish People: Thoughts on Parashat Ki Tissa

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Ki Tissa

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Some years ago, I read about a German Jew who established a "Jewish Nazi Society" during the 1930s. While Jews throughout Germany (and Europe in general) were facing horrible anti-Jewish persecutions, this Jewish man internalized the vicious anti-Semitic propaganda to such an extent that he also became a Jew-hater. Perhaps he thought that by identifying as a Nazi, he would be spared personally from the anti-Jewish persecutions. He wanted to be considered as "a good Jew" in the eyes of the Nazis, rather than be accounted among the "bad" Jews whom the Nazis were tormenting.

I don't know what ultimately happened to the members of the "Jewish Nazi Society", but I doubt that they were spared by the Nazi hate machine. The Nazis hated Jews for having Jewish blood, regardless of their beliefs or political leanings. Jewish Nazis were just as despicable to Nazis as any other Jews. The Jewish Nazis were despised by Jews for their treachery; and despised by Nazis for their Jewishness.

These thoughts came to mind as I contemplated the phenomenon of Jews in our time who struggle to undermine Israel, and who identify themselves with those who strive to destroy the Jewish State. These individuals seem to suffer from the same psychological problems as members of the "Jewish Nazi Society" in Germany. Israel is constantly barraged by its enemies--through terrorism, economic boycotts, political isolation, anti-Israel propaganda, threats of war and nuclear destruction. To the enemies of Israel, the Jewish State is the object of blind, unmitigated hatred. The enemies use every possible forum to malign Israel and deny its legitimacy. This unceasing war against Israel is resisted courageously by the Jewish State, by Jewish supporters of Israel, by millions of

non-Jewish supporters of Israel.

It is bizarre and morally repugnant that the one tiny Jewish country in the world has to suffer so much abuse. It is a matter of honor to stand up for Israel and to remind the world of the right of the Jews to their own homeland. We need to counter the attacks against Israel in every forum. We need to speak truth to combat the unceasing stream of lies heaped up against Israel.

Does this mean that we must agree with and condone everything that Israel does? Of course not. Israelis themselves are vocal in their criticisms of aspects of Israeli life and government policies. As long as criticisms are voiced with love, they should be welcome. They help shake the status quo and move things in a better direction. But criticism must be balanced with an appreciation of the amazingly impressive positive aspects of the Jewish State.

While fair and loving critics are vital to Israel's welfare, haters are destructive. Haters do not seek to improve Israel--they seek to destroy it. Their goal is not to encourage a vibrant, flourishing Jewish State--their goal is to eliminate the Jewish State. The hatred is so blind and so intense, that it is oblivious to facts and figures. For haters, Israel is guilty just by existing. It is particularly regrettable when people of Jewish ancestry align themselves with the haters. In some perverse way, they may think this separates them from the fate of Israel and the Jewish people--they think they will be viewed as "the good Jews" in contrast with the Zionists who are viewed as "the bad Jews". But such Jews are despised by Jews as traitors, and are despised (or mocked) by the haters of Israel--because after all, these hating Jews are still Jews! The enemies are happy to use such people for propaganda purposes; but if they were ever to succeed in their wicked designs, these hating Jews would not fare well. Their treachery to Israel and their fellow Jews would not make them beloved by the enemies of Jews and Israel.

We have read recently of Jewish haters/self-haters who have participated in-- and even spearheaded-- anti-Israel boycotts. We have read of Israeli professors/left wing intellectuals who have participated in anti-Israel programs on college campuses throughout the world. We have read columns by Jewish journalists that are so blatantly unfair to Israel that it makes us shudder.

The great 16th century kabbalist and biblical commentator, Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh, offered a homiletic interpretation of the first verse in this week’s Torah portion. When the Israelites are to choose a leader (ki tissa et rosh benei yisrael), they should choose one who is totally devoted to Israel, who is willing to give his life on behalf of the Lord and on behalf of the people (ish kofer nafsho). It is

destructive to have half-hearted or self-serving people in positions of authority. Total commitment is an essential component of leadership.

But this interpretation applies not only to the officially designated leadership; it applies to each Jew. Each of us is an ambassador of our people; each of us represents the history, culture and traditions of the millennial Jewish experience; each of us is part of the Jewish destiny. To play our roles as proud and courageous Jews, we need to overcome inferiority complexes and reject “politically correct” pressures; we need to stand tall and stand strong, with the wholeness of our being, on behalf of the God of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the People of Israel.

Angel for Shabbat