

Emor

May 21, 2016

This Week's Text

וַיִּקַּב בֶּן-הָאִשָּׁה הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית אֶת-הַשֵּׁם, וַיִּקְלַל, וַיְבִיאוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה; וְשֵׁם אִמּוֹ שְׁלֹמִית בַּת-דִּבְרִי,
לְמַטֵּה-דָן

Leviticus 24:11 *The son of an Israelite woman pronounced the name [of G-d] and blasphemed, so he was brought to Moses. His mother's name was Shelomit, daughter of Dibri, from the tribe of Dan.*



Linking Our Text to Modern Israel

Time and again, we read that every word of Torah is essential. There are no excess words within the narratives or the laws of our scripture. What, then, can we deduce from the explicit identification of the blasphemer in this week's portion, *Emor*? His mother's name is mentioned, her preceding generation named, and she is identified by her tribe. Medieval commentator Rashi tells us that the reason for the inclusion of what might initially appear to be insignificant details was to teach that shame affects not only the sinner, but his entire family and community.

The Jewish community holds diverse views on the appropriate way to communicate negative thoughts about modern Israel.

For some, there is no room for criticism of Israel; they see and feel that the rest of the world brings more than enough condemnation. For those who hold this view, speaking irreverently about people or policy in Israel would shame the Jewish people wherever they reside, around the world. Negative speak would condemn all Israelis, its leaders, and the country's policies. Additionally, anti-Israel or anti-Zionist rhetoric is often perceived as a not-so-subtle overlay for anti-Semitism. Or even a cloak for overt anti-Semitism. Criticism of Israeli policies and practices ranges from legitimate disagreement to denying the Jewish right to self-determination in a Jewish state (thereby denying Israel's legitimacy as a state or denying the validity of Jewish peoplehood altogether).

Some feel compelled to speak out about ways they believe Israel fails to meet the standards of a democratic state. In a recent opinion piece published in *Ha'aretz*, Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie addressed the entitlement of American liberals to voice their criticism of Israel and its policies. Yoffie states:

Additional References:

Noam Zion, [Criticism and Loyalty: A Challenge for Jewish Citizenship](#), Hartman Chevruta Study

GuideEric H. Yoffie, [Move on From the American-Jewish Liberal vs. Israeli Liberal Fight Club](#), January 21, 2016

Israel is the state of the Jewish people, and Zionism affirms that Israel is the concern and the potential home of Jews everywhere. For almost 70 years, Israelis and Zionist activists have invited us to the Zionist party, reminded us of our connections to Eretz Yisrael, and asked us for our help and support. This means that they cannot ask us now to sit in the corner and be silent. This means that we need no one's permission to express our views on Israeli matters. And this means that we are entitled to do what we can to influence Israel's policies. These are rights that Zionism bestows on all Jews, and we need not justify ourselves to anyone.

In March 2016, the Pew Research Center released a report, "[Israel's Religiously Divided Society](#)" in which researchers concluded that 70% of Israeli Jews view the Jewish diaspora as vitally important to the long-term survival of the Jewish people. The survey shows that the vast majority of Israeli Jews value their connections with American Jews. One example of this is revealed in the fact that most Israeli Jews see themselves as sharing in a common destiny with Jews in the U.S. Furthermore, approximately 60% agreed that Jews in the U.S. have a positive influence over life in Israel.

Balancing pride in Israel and the extraordinary accomplishments of this young nation while offering a constructive appraisal of the areas where Israel falls short presents a challenge. All modern Zionists should meet this challenge head-on, unapologetically defending what they believe is right. However, in our critique or praise, Jews should educate themselves with the facts that inform those assessments. That requires more than transferring diaspora politics and ideologies on a 1:1 basis to the Israeli context.

Perhaps we should see Israel, her policies and accomplishments, as part of a broad family. We may disagree with our family without divorcing them or hoping for their demise.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the best place for critical thinking and conversation about Israel? Common media outlets? Internal Jewish media? In our synagogues or Jewish organizations only? Before we criticize or comment, should one consider how our evaluations might be used by those who despise Israel, to use that criticism in proving their cases against Israel?
2. Do you agree with Yoffie's statement that, because Israel is the homeland for all Jews, then all Jews can speak out as they see fit? Or, should Jews who do not live in Israel and do not vote there keep silent on their criticism of Israel's actions?
3. If you were any Israeli political leader, should you consider criticism or praise from Jews who live in the diaspora? How nuanced is criticism in general of any person, topic, or issue? Should it be more or less nuanced when Jews comment about the behavior of other Jews?