

Edah Staff:

Rabbi Saul Berman, Director

Rabbi Bob Carroll, Program Director

Rachel Craig, Administrator

Marisa Yammer, Asst. Program Director

Esther Berman, Administrative Assistant

Edah Happenings:

Rabbi Yehuda Sarna on "Judaism as an Art Form" And Rabbi Dr. Jeffrey Woolf on "Religious Zionism: From Crisis to Renewal?"
Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22, March 1, 8 @ JCC in NYC

Jewish Town Hall: The Shidduch Crisis
Feb. 20 @ JCC in NYC

Land, Legacy and Love

By Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot

At the close of the first section of *Parshat Vaerah*, expanding on the *brit avot* (the covenant made to the forefathers), God promises the Jewish people that He will bring them to the Land of Israel and give it to them as a *Morasha* (6:8)-literally "an inheritance or a possession". This unique term, used in connection to the promise of the covenantal land and used here for the first time, reflects the intensification of the eternal bond between this newly emerging nation and the land, waiting as it were, for its rightful heirs to come home. In truth the term *Morasha*, contains at least two distinct meanings and messages for us as we contemplate this first section of the *parasha* and the unfolding of the grand Divine drama of the Torah.

First, *morasha*, on its most basic level is akin to the more common word, *yerusha*- an inheritance. Indeed this is how Onkelos renders the phrase into Aramaic- *yeruta*. In that sense, the Jewish people, both past, present and future, are being informed that the Land of Israel is an inheritance to us from our forefathers. We are returning to our patrimony and to a place that is our original home, our ancestral womb. In that spirit, our connection to this small parcel of land at the crossroads of Mesopotamia and Africa spans the chasm of the generations and millennia. If today we have an ultimate claim to any part of the Land of Israel; if we are mystically pulled to its hills and valleys and cities and thoroughfares, it is because we stand on the shoulders of all those myriads of generations who lived and prospered and dreamt and died in its environs in ancient Israel. We stand on the shoulders of the Prophets and the simple folk who lived in the Israelite commonwealths in that land and experienced the Jewish national dimension in its homeland till it was cut down brutally by exile and dispersion. We are the children and grandchildren of those who lovingly yearned to return to its soil and eventually made the initial efforts in the middle ages and early modern period to return to it. And of course, we stand on the shoulders of all those in the last century and a half who have translated the hope of two thousand years in to a pulsating, living reality that is the State of Israel, may it continue to flourish and grow. Moreover, if it is a *yerusha*, then we do not only have responsibility to the past, but to future generations as well in communicating that longing and sense of historical rootedness, to turn the inheritance into a legacy, a *yerusha* into a *morasha*.

Second, in a more midrashic vein, allow me to make use of Hazal's creative and exquisite reading in the one other place that the phrase *Morasha* appearing in relation to the Torah itself: *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morasha kehilat Yaakov'* (Deut. 33:3). The Rabbis, in

the Talmud (Pesahim 59) homiletically suggest: "Do not read *morasha* but *me'orasa-betrothed*". This rabbinic reading points to a passionate, existential love relationship that one is charged to develop with the Torah. This should be the guiding principle for our relationship as well to the land of Israel as well. And in our day and age this sense must be transferred as well to the State of Israel, the very vehicle for our national sovereignty and ability to function as national entity and people in our homeland and on the world scene. Our devotion and connection to Eretz Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael must be one of passionate love, of infatuation and desire, not simply sentimental connections to the ethnic homeland of the Jewish people. And this is particularly important to reemphasize in this period that we are in. On one pole there are some in our Jewish community who have serious qualms about policies of the State of Israel which leads them to feel estranged and disconnected from the State. In addition, one sometimes hears Jews (and this even in the ranks of those committed to Torah and mitzvot) who speak in a universalism that leaves no room for that intense love of one's own people and its attendant manifestations such as nationalism, a homeland and a unique language and culture. This approach ends up distorting the complex and rich message of *Or-LaGoyim* and *Tikkun Olam* and directs us to downplay our own unique identity, history, and concern for the Jewish collective. This approach, with its selective citations, chooses to forget that Abraham's mission to transform the world fully recognizes the need for a full-bodied real nation to carry the mantle of *devar Hashem* in the world to achieve its ultimate universal goals.

On the other pole we live at a time when some voices in the *dati-leumi* camp, seething with anger at the decision to withdraw from Gaza, speak about "disengaging from the state", and a loss of passion for its institutions and their development. To these twin poles of disassociation, the message of *morasha*, of a passionate love affair is extremely relevant. Lovers sometimes fight, sometimes even bitterly, but in the end, true soul mates return to each other and can never be rent apart. In a passionate, deep relationship, the core bonds transcend this or that argument. It rather yields the ultimate existential connection and commitment, full of depth and verve, even in the midst of challenges and disputes. It yields an unending love affair, a *morasha* that is indeed transformed into a *me-orasa*.

Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot is Chair of the Departments for Bible and Jewish Thought and Instructor of Bible, Jewish Thought and Talmud at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

Darfur: A Modern Day Genocide

For more information on what you can do, see <http://www.edah.org>

I. Background

The Republic of Sudan has endured a civil war that spans four decades during which two million people have died. The Sudanese government and its allied forces have committed egregious human rights abuses, including forced starvation through the denial of international humanitarian assistance; abduction and enslavement of women and children; forced displacement of civilians; and bombing of civilian targets and humanitarian facilities.

More than 2.7 million African Muslims from traditional farming communities have been forcibly uprooted and subjected to murder, rape, and other horrifying atrocities. Their homes, villages and livelihoods are being destroyed by Sudanese government forces, and by the militias they support, known as *Janjaweed* (Arabic for "evil men on horseback").

The *Janjaweed* militia, with Sudanese government assistance, is committing these atrocities to decimate the black, non-Arabic populations of Darfur, specifically the Fur, Masaalit, and Zaghawa ethnic communities.

II. The Situation Now : Refugees, Rape and Genocide

Almost 2 million men, women, and children are crowded into camps for internally displaced persons in Sudan and refugee camps in Chad without sufficient food, clean water, health care, or schools.

More than 3 million people face malnutrition; nearly a quarter of young children do not have enough to eat, in large part because the World Food Program faces a 40% shortfall.

Some 400,000 people are dead from genocidal violence, pervasive hunger, and illness. Each month 15,000 people die - another 500 people die every day the world waits.

Incidents of rape are escalating; security in the camps is deteriorating; aid workers are being threatened and arrested.

III. Recognizing Genocide

The following have all identified actions of the Sudanese government as Genocide under the terms of The United Nations Genocide Convention:

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

The US Congress In the Sudan Peace Act of 2002

The Committee on Conscience of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

IV. The Jewish Duty to Respond

The Duty to Rescue life and limb, based on "Lo taamod al dam re'acha" (Lev. 19:16), and on "Vechai imach" (Lev. 25:35), extends to all persons. (Ramban, Hosafot leMitzvot Aseh, 16; Meiri, Sanhedrin 58a.)

The Mitzvah of Tzedakah, to provide food, clothing and shelter to the poor, extends to the impoverished of any nation, and one who shuts his eyes to that duty is called wicked, evil and sinner. (Rambam, Matnot Ani'im 7:7, 10:3).

The Prohibition against aiding or encouraging wrongdoing (Lev. 19:14) applies to all persons and societies and precludes indirect aid even through failure to protest. (Avodah Zara 6a-b; Nedarim 22a; Rambam, Kings 9:14.)

We cannot stand by in silence!

Edah

45 West 36th Street

10th Floor

New York, NY 10018

www.edah.org

1-212-244-7501