

I have a clear memory of a television show starring Bill Cosby that ran when I was a child, many years before the more famous *Cosby Show* made its debut. Bill Cosby played a gym teacher or a basketball coach, and the episode I clearly remember is about him needing another basketball. To obtain one, he had to fill out a requisition form. He went to the office to obtain one only to be told there was only one requisition form left (remember, this was long before computers and probably when “Xerox machines” were not so common. The man in the requisition office asked Cosby a question: “What would you wish for if a genie gave you one wish?” Cosby gave the same answer I would have given: “I would wish for more wishes.” The man in the office agreed with his answer and so denied him the use of the last requisition form, because he needed it to requisition more requisition forms. This sticks in my mind because it seems so clear that given one wish, the obvious choice is to use it for more wishes.

I approach a passage in tomorrow's Torah reading the same way. Tomorrow we are given a choice between four things: life, death, blessing, and curse. Which would you choose? I would choose blessing—why not? Choose blessing and have your life filled with nothing but good things. But that is not what the Torah tells us to do. Here is what we will read tomorrow:

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life — if you and your offspring would live — by loving the LORD your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the LORD swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.*

We are told not to choose blessing, but life and all that goes with it. Life includes all three of the things that follow it in the passage. Life includes not only blessing, but curse and death. Still, we are commanded to choose life.

My friends, it is this choice that separates Israel from her neighbors. Judaism embraces life. Extremist Islam celebrates death. And there was celebrating in the West Bank this past week. I mean that literally. Thousands rallied in celebration of the murder of four innocent Israelis. Two of the victims were Yitzchak and Tami Ames, who were in their mid forties and left behind six children aged 24 to 5. I was unable to find the names of the other two victims, but as you probably know, one of them was a pregnant woman. The very next day, two more Israelis were shot in the West Bank, Rabbi Moshe Moreno and his wife. Fortunately, they survived and are expected to recover.

My friends, it is necessary to talk about things like this using generalizations. I acknowledge that there are exceptions to these generalizations, that there are some Israelis who would love to wipe out all Arabs, and some Palestinians who long for peace with Israel. But they are the exceptions. We must look at the two societies. One will read this week from their—our—most sacred book **וּבַחֲרַת** **בַּחַיִּים**—therefore, choose life—and the other has said, “We love death as much as the Jews love life.” That is a direct quote from a Hamas spokesman, and as we know, it was Hamas that proudly claimed responsibility for these shootings.

They were praised throughout the Arab world, including the remarks of the head of Hezbollah who made the Arab agenda crystal clear, as if it was not already all too clear: “Palestine from the sea to the river is the property of the Palestinian nation, of the Arab and the Muslim, and no one

has the right to relinquish this land, not even a drop of its water.”

Yes, my friends, there are Arabs who want peace with Israel, but they are powerless and forced into silence. That is why the woman I spoke about last week, Irshad Manji, is so important. She risks her life by calling for reform from within Islam.

We are about to begin the new year of 5771. We look forward to the new year with hope for ourselves, our community, our people, and the world. We look forward to the new year with hope for peace, real peace, to come to the State of Israel. Before the new year even begins, we are reminded all too violently of the likelihood that at this time next year, nothing will have changed. We are negotiating for peace not with others who desire it, but who see it as a tactic in their efforts to destroy Israel. What are we to do? Our Torah answers that question in this

week's sedra. Although life, in addition to blessing, also includes curse and death, we are nevertheless told to choose life. Unlike our enemies who make the opposite choice, we will do as our Torah commands us. We will choose life and all that life comprises. That is what makes us who we are as a people. Let us never become like those who seek to destroy us, like those who embrace death. Better they should kill us than turn us into them. Even if the choice brings death, we choose life. We always have, and we always will. לחיים—to life!