



High Holiday 5787 Sermon Resource: Settler Violence and State Violence

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These collected texts are designed to assist you — rabbis and cantors — as you prepare for the 5787 High Holidays.

As we near the third anniversary of October 7 and the start of the subsequent war, which has led to the destruction of Gaza and devastation in the West Bank, many in our communities are struggling to make sense of terrible suffering, maintain strained relationships, and engage deeply with Torah values. They are looking to you as their clergy for both pastoral care and moral leadership.

T'ruah's focus this High Holiday season is on helping our communities make a narrative shift: expanding beyond rightful condemnation of settler violence to seeing and working against the violence of the occupation and settlement projects as a whole. We share three themes, each paired with a text and framing. We hope that these resources help inspire and support you as you bring the ethical message of our tradition to your community this High Holiday season. As we pray in the *Yotzer* for Yom Kippur, “cleanse us in Your wellspring, G!d who is clad in Justness.”

1. Murdering a person damages the world.

Many of us have seen the devastating violence carried out by violent extremists harming Palestinians in the West Bank. Their actions absolutely deserve condemnation. For those of us determined to stop this, we must widen our lens and see that settler violence is not just a story about individual extremists. It is a mechanism through which annexation is carried out — using intimidation, violence, and coercion in an attempt to forcibly displace Palestinian residents and reshape facts on the ground.

In emphasizing the spiritual catastrophe of killing a person, Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (19th-century Germany) describes the damage done to the world itself that goes along with any act of murder:

חורב ש"ל:ח'

"התגלות ה'" בעד הארץ הנהו "האדם" — מעטה גופו — "מקדש ה'" — לכן היד הנטויה שהיא כוננה, להשחית ולהמית את האדם, היא תחריב את "מקדש ה'" — היא תגרש את רוח קדשו מחוג הפעולה, אשר יעד ה' בעדו — ארור אתה אם תרצח נפש!!

Horeb 330:8

The human being is God's manifestation upon the earth. The human body is a "Temple of G-d." Therefore, the hand raised to destroy and kill a human being destroys the Temple of G-d. It expels G-d's holy spirit from the sphere of activity for which God destined it.

Cursed are you if you murder a soul!

2. The Israeli government enables and causes destruction of Palestinian homes and life.

What is happening in the West Bank is not only acts of violence, but an outcome of Israeli government policy. We see this pattern repeating itself. First, settlers establish outposts near rural Palestinian communities. Then, the Israeli government and/or military allocate resources like paved roads, connection to electricity, and water sources to these outposts. Settlers terrorize the surrounding communities, who are then forced to flee. After that, settlers establish new or expanded settlements on the land of the displaced Palestinians, which in a growing number of cases is retroactively legally recognized by the Israeli government. In the past, we may have heard about Israeli police or military forces merely standing by while settlers commit violent acts, but this already blurred line between state violence and settler violence has disappeared. Since Oct 7, the military has armed and uniformed thousands of settlers through "regional defense" units and settlement "emergency response teams" — and despite extensive documentation of their attacks on Palestinians, not a single indictment has been filed against a settler-soldier in these units. Betzalel Smotrich, who oversees the government's control over civilian life in the West Bank, has laid out his [disturbing annexation plan](#): "The overriding principle for applying sovereignty [to the West Bank] is maximum territory with minimum Arabs."

The Sefer haChinuch writes concerning the spiritual root and purpose of the commandment not to destroy fruit trees:

ספר החינוך תקכ"ט ...שרש המצוה ידוע, שהוא כדי ללמד נפשנו לאהב הטוב ולהתעלות ולהדבק בו, ומתוך כך תדבק בנו הטובה, ונרחיק מכל דבר רע ומכל דבר השחתה. וזהו דרך החסידים ואנשי מעשה, אוהבים שלום ושמים בטוב הבריות ומקרבים אותן לתורה, ולא יאבדו אפלו גרגר של חרדל בעולם, ויצר עליהם בכל אבדון והשחתה שיראו, ואם יוכלו להציל יצילו כל דבר מהשחית בכל כחם. ולא כן הרשעים אחיהם של מזיקים, שמחים בהשחתת עולם, והמה משחיתים את עצמם, והמשחית שום דבר מתוך חמה אמרו עליו (שבת קה, ב) שהוא כעובד עבודה זרה, שכן דרכו של יצר הרע, היום אומר לו עשה כן ואם יאמין אותו למחר יאמר לו לך עבוד עבודה זרה...
Sefer HaChinukh 529 ...The root of this commandment is well-known — it is in order to teach our souls to love good and benefit and to cling to it. And through this, good clings to us and we will distance [ourselves] from all bad and destructive things. And this is the way of the pious and people of [proper] action — they love peace and are happy for the good of the creatures and bring them close to Torah, and they do not destroy even a grain of mustard in the world. And they are distressed by all loss and destruction that they see; and if they can prevent it, they will prevent any destruction with all of their strength. But not so are the wicked — the brothers of the destructive spirits. They rejoice in the destruction of the world, and they destroy themselves ...And in general, they [the Sages], may their memory be blessed, forbade to do anything destructive. And they said about anyone who destroys anything out of rage (Shabbat 105a) that he is like one who worships idolatry, as so is the way of the evil impulse: Today it says to him, “Do this”; and if he trusts it, tomorrow, it will say to him, “Go and worship idolatry”...

3. We have a responsibility to speak up.

Many of us take part in conversations about settler violence. These conversations are moments of political and moral possibility. They give us an entry point to make connections between acts of violence by settlers and broader structures of power, including state violence, annexation, and the realities of Gaza. Through these connections, we can start to build another reality. Precisely because so much is at stake, we must stay engaged – be present, lead with curiosity, and breathe through discomfort.



When teaching about *hitbodedut*, seclusion in conversational prayer with G'd, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov wrote about the importance of persisting in speaking even when it is challenging and one does not know what to say:

ליקוטי מוהר"ן, תנינא צ"ו:א'
...וְאָמַר: שְׁאֵפְלוּ אִם אֵינוּ יְכוּלִּים לְדַבֵּר רַק דְּבֹר אֶחָד, יִהְיֶה חֶזֶק בְּדַעְתּוֹ, וַיְדַבֵּר אוֹתוֹ הַדְּבֹר כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה פַּעַמִּים
בְּלִי שְׂעוֹר וְעָרֶךְ, וְאֵפְלוּ אִם יִבְלֶה כַּמָּה וְכַמָּה יָמִים בְּדְבֹר זֶה לְבַד גַּם זֶה טוֹב. וַיִּהְיֶה חֶזֶק וְאִמִּץ, וַיִּרְבֶּה לְדַבֵּר
אוֹתוֹ הַדְּבֹר פַּעַמִּים אֵין מִסְפָּר, עַד שֶׁיִּרְחַם עָלָיו הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ, וַיִּפְתַּח פִּיו, וַיּוּכַל לְפָרֵשׁ שִׂיחָתוֹ: וְאָמַר, שֶׁהַדְּבֹר
יֵשׁ לוֹ כַּח גְּדוּל מְאֹד, כִּי הֵלֵא יְכוּלִּין לְלַחֵשׁ עַל קִנְיַת־שִׁרְפָה שְׁלֵא תוּכַל לִירוֹת. וְהִבֵּן.

Likutei Moharan, Part II 96:1

...He also said: Even if a person can only say one thing, he should be resolute and say that thing over and over again, endlessly. And even if he spends many, many days saying nothing but this thing — that, too, is good! He should be strong and courageous, and continue to say that thing countless times until God takes pity on him and opens his mouth, enabling him to elaborate his words. The Rebbe also said: The spoken word is very powerful. Why, with a whisper it is possible to prevent a gun from firing. Understand this.

Please let us know if and how you use these resources. I would love to think with you about how to do this work. Feel free to reach out in advance of the holidays, and please share your sermons with me at JWiner@Truah.org

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