

## EDITORIALS...

### Human Rights Watch finally does something right, sort of

A truly amazing event happened last week. Human Rights Watch (HRW) declared that rocket attacks on Israel launched from Gaza amounted to war crimes. What was astonishing was that HRW took time out from criticizing Israel to actually point out that when Hamas targets Israeli civilians with rockets, it is committing a war crime.

It has been obvious during the years that Israel's southern region has had to endure the unceasing barrage of rockets from Gaza that Israel's civilian population was the only target. Hamas rockets were designed to kill and terrorize the civilian population. The HRW report recognized that the unceasing missile barrage has taken a tremendous psychological toll. As a result, many families have had to move to other regions of Israel. It was in response to these attacks that Israel was forced to launch Operation Cast Lead in January.

Who could blame Israel for wanting to protect its citizens?

The answer, of course, is that Human Rights Watch did blame Israel. HRW wasted little time in labeling Israel's defensive actions a "war crime." Not long after Operation Cast Lead was launched, HRW was on the march against Israel.

Usually, the story ends there—with only Israel being accused. This time, at least, HRW felt the need to balance its criticism of Israel with a condemnation of Hamas.

Does that put things right?

No, HRW's criticism of Israel was unfair to begin with. Its criticism of Hamas and its rocket attacks was belated and half-hearted. It is, however, a step in the right direction. ▲

## Proposed civil marriage bill in Israel misses mark

By GILAD KARIV  
JTA

JERUSALEM—The promoters of Israel's new bill for civil marriage for those without religion are hurrying to present it as a significant and historical legal breakthrough, but actually it's nothing other than political trickery.

According to the proposed legislation, couples that do not belong to any of the recognized religions in Israel will be able to register in a civil union and enjoy the same rights one would in a legal marriage. The bill supposedly would solve the troubles of 300,000 Israeli citizens who cannot marry in their land because technically they have no religion.

Practically, however, this law will fail to achieve its intended goal and will not provide a solution to the depressing problem of tens of thousands of couples who may not wed because they don't fit the narrow parameters allowed by the state.

The biggest problem with the bill is that it applies only to cou-

ples in which neither partner has a religion. A couple in which one member is an immigrant whose Jewish status is not recognized by the Chief Rabbinate and the other is a Jew still would not be able to marry. In order to have their marriage recognized by Israel, such couples still will need to travel abroad and wed in a foreign country for Israel to recognize their union.

Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics says that of the 31,655 Israeli couples that were married outside of Israel from 2000 to 2005, only 1,219 couples (less than four percent) would have been able to benefit from this law. Nearly 90 percent of the immigrants who do not have a religious classification marry a Jewish spouse, meaning that the passage of this law will have little bearing on its intended population. As if that weren't

enough, this law would create a blacklist of couples who do marry this way.

This problem was born in the mass immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, wherein many olim fit the criteria of the Law of Return by having a Jewish father or grandparent but

not a Jewish mother. Not identifying themselves as Christian, and not receiving official Jewish status from the state, they were classi-

fied as having no religion. (Ironically, religion in Russia was determined by the father.)

What an absurdity in the state of the Jewish people that a Hebrew-speaking couple can marry only after a public denial of their Jewish identities and connection to the Jewish people. This proposed law provides an unfitting solution and an opportunity missed.

*This law will be the tombstone on the grave of the government's obligation to solve the problem of non-Orthodox marriage.*

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## RELIGION

### Looking for moral voices in today's society



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Re'eh/Shoftim  
Deut. 11:26-21:9

Moral questions confront us each day. They can be mundane: Should I keep the change the store clerk mistakenly gave me? Or they can be significant: Is universal healthcare a moral imperative? Who are the moral voices in our society that help answer these questions?

In Jewish history, two figures have acted as the moral conscience for our people. First there were the prophets—people like Isaiah and Amos—whose words we read weekly in the Haftara. They said things like, "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation" and "Let justice well up like water, and righteousness flow

like a mighty stream." They were called by G-d to speak out against injustice and corruption, and implore people to live a life guided by *hesed* (kindness) and *tzedek* (justice).

After the destruction of the first Temple, however, a shift began to take place in the moral leadership. The prophet was replaced by the *hakham*—the sage. One of the reasons for this shift from prophets to sages is obvious—it's hard to tell who's a real prophet. Our parasha this week, *Re'eh*, expresses this concern. At the beginning of chap. 13, we read how to tell when someone is a false prophet, but the Torah never tells us what makes a true prophet.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel extensively studied the prophets. He describes the prophet as someone "who feels fiercely" and is "an iconoclast." The prophet is compelled by G-d's call to speak out against injustice. These traits often cause the prophet to live on the margins of society—to work for change from the outside. This inevitably led to

much resentment and ridicule. Unfortunately, our prophets rarely succeeded in changing the people's ways.

Perhaps for this reason, the rabbis of the Talmud said, "From the day the first Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the sages—for *hakham adif me'navi*, a sage is greater than a prophet."

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, wrote an essay on this topic. Rav Kook first looked to Moshe—our greatest prophet and a sage. When Moshe passed away, his job was split into two parts. The prophets were tasked with speaking in general principles, which means speaking out against idolatry, injustice and corruption, while the sages were assigned the details. Rav Kook concluded that a sage is greater than a prophet because the work of the sage is the vehicle to achieve the goals of the prophet. Studying and expounding on the details of Torah should bring us to

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## DRY BONES...



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