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BH

HOW HAPPY CAN WE BE AT THE DEATH OF A FOE?

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How happy can we be that Osama bin Laden is dead? What do Jewish texts say about this?

Well, that's a bit of a sticky wicket. Let's investigate. First of all, we don't really have too much experience, as a people, of bringing pain and defeat to our enemies. We have Hannukkah and Purim, to be sure. But all the other holidays that were in the Fasting Scroll faded away after the destruction of the Second Temple.

Probably our best expression of joy at the death of a foe is one we recite everyday: the Song at the Sea (Exodus 15), the song of joy we sang when Pharaoh's troops drown in the sea. But that's not the same as human victory over a foe. That's a miracle from God.

Perhaps Osama bin Laden's death can be likened to the death of Amalek, who the Torah tells us we should utterly destroy:

Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; How he met you by the way, and struck at your rear, all who were feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around, in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess, that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget it. (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

The mandate to blot out Amalek can be taken as a mandate to blot out Osama bin Laden. They both represent radical evil.

So now we can ask, "Are we allowed to rejoice that bin Laden is dead?"

We'd like to suggest some criteria: Were the innocent spared? Did any of our forces die? Was he treated with respect at burial?

The answer to all those questions is satisfactory, we believe.

Discussion Questions:

1. What other criteria might there be for deciding whether to rejoice in victory?
2. Should we have said Hallel, the traditional expression of joy? How would you say Hallel on Yom Hashoa (when

Bin Laden was killed)?

3. Would the blessing we say over the Hannukkah lights, "al hanisim" "for the miracles" have worked in this case?
4. Did you rejoice in his death? How did you sanctify your joy?

Looking forward to your answers!