Time to Stop Israel's Deadly
'Khad Gadya' Machine
Passover Fable Provides Timely Metaphor for Conflict,
Says Prize-Winning Author
By: Michael J. Cooper

"Khad Gadya," the old Aramaic fable sung at the end of the Passover Seder, is often associated with a sense of relief that the long evening is finally over. It also helps that it comes after four glasses of wine.

It traces a cascade of events beginning with a baby goat being devoured by a cat. Each verse adds a link to the chain reaction: a dog comes and bites the cat, a stick beats the dog, fire burns the stick, water puts out the fire … and on it goes. Each successive verse gets longer until the fable ends in a final karmic stroke – God kills the Death Angel. It's part morality-play, part Rube Goldberg device.

It's also a great metaphor, making its appearance in a painful contemporary poem by Yehudah Amichai.

An Arab shepherd is searching for his goat on Mount Zion
and on the opposite mountain I am searching
for my little boy.
An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father
both in their temporary failure.
Our voices meet above the Sultan's Pool
in the valley between us. Neither of us wants
the child or the goat to get caught in the wheels
of the terrible Khad Gadya machine…

Amichai's metaphor – the terrible Khad Gadya machine – is a perfect analogy for the Arab-Israeli conflict, with violence generated and regenerated by self-righteous rage, desperation and vengeance.

The workings of this infernal machine were brought home to me toward the end of a recent medical mission to an East Jerusalem hospital. A graduate of Tel Aviv University Medical School, I'm now a pediatric cardiologist in Northern California, returning to Israel a few times

each year to do volunteer work in the occupied territories. I come to help because, due to travel restrictions, pediatric specialty care is relatively unavailable to Palestinian children.

After a day of heart surgery in East Jerusalem, I went to a West Jerusalem hospital to be with my cousin and his family after the birth of his second grandchild. After admiring the new baby and sharing a dinner of two large vegetarian pizzas, I said good-bye and left. Passing through the hospital lobby, I stopped to read a large poster depicting the former medical director of the emergency department, Dr. David Appelbaum.

On Sept. 9, 2003, Dr. Appelbaum was one of seven people killed in a suicide bombing at a café in Jerusalem. Among the dead was his daughter, Nava. They had gone to the café for a father and daughter talk before Nava's wedding, which was to have taken place the next day. Before the burial, her fiancé placed her wedding ring on the cloth covering her shroud.

And the terrible Khad Gadya machine grinds on …

The very next day, back at the East Jerusalem hospital, I was called to the pediatric intensive care unit to evaluate a quadriplegic 4-year-old Arab girl a month after she was paralyzed by a gunshot wound to the neck. Asil Arara had been playing in a field near her home in Anata, not far from the Separation Wall and the Israeli settlement of Anatot on Oct. 25, 2011.

The Palestinian village of Anata has experienced escalating violence; about a month before Asil was shot, men and women of the village were beaten by Israeli settlers with clubs and pistol butts when they attempted to cultivate their land. And now this – a 4-year-old paralyzed from her neck down, who will require complete and total care every day of her life.

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The tragedies of Dr. Appelbaum, his daughter, and Asil underscore the devastating workings of the Khad Gadya machine on both sides – the grinding machinery of an occupation that many Israelis believe must end.

This is not a leftist or defeatist position. This is a practical position, one that's been promoted by such committed Zionists as David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Rabin, Ami Ayalon and Avraham Shalom. Ayalon and Shalom are both former directors of the Israeli Security Service, the Shin-Bet. These men and thousands of Israelis like them see that it's impossible for Israeli democracy to survive while trying to ingest and administer the occupied territories.

To quote Shalom; "We must once and for all admit there is another side, that it has feelings, that it is suffering and that we are behaving disgracefully ... this entire behavior is the result of the occupation."

Isn't it time to stop the terrible Khad Gadya mahine? Isn't it time for peace?

About Michael J. Cooper

Michael J. Cooper is the author of "Foxes in the Vineyard," (www.michaeljcooper.net), an Indie Publishing grand prize-winning novel that explores Israel's birth through historical fiction. He emigrated to Israel after graduating high school in Oakland, Calif. Living in Israel for more than a decade, he studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and graduated from Tel Aviv University Medical School. Now a clinical professor at the University of California San Francisco Medical Center and a practicing pediatric cardiologist in Northern California, he returns to Israel several times a year, volunteering on medical missions under the auspices of the Palestine Children's Relief Fund.