

MARCH 24, 2006

Parashat Vayikra

An Act of Love

Adam ki yakriv mikem korban “*When one offers from among you an offering*” (Leviticus 1:2)

In his commentary on this verse, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch notes the imperfection of the renderings of the word *korban* in the vernacular. “Sacrifice” implies something we do that leaves us, somehow, poorer. “Offering” gives the impression that we do it with the expectation of something in return. The *korban*, on the other hand, is an act of love and devotion.

Ohavei Yisrael understand well the difference. Involving ourselves in pro-Israel activism takes hard work and personal resources, but most who engage in it don’t consider it a “sacrifice.” We are rewarded for it in innumerable ways, but don’t consider it an “offering.”

The United States has always understood its foreign aid to Israel as much more than an investment and much more than an obligation to a sister democracy. It has been an act of true friendship. Recently, the U.S. administration requested \$2.4 billion in military aid to Israel as part of its 2008 fiscal year budget. The proposed aid for Israel represents the last year of a 10-year plan between Israel and the United States to phase out economic aid to Israel while gradually increasing the amount of military aid. During the past decade, Israel’s total aid package has decreased from \$3 billion total to \$2.4 billion in military assistance.

As American Jews, working to strengthen the bonds between the U.S. and Israel is, truly, a *korban*. It is an act of love for both countries. As the United States begins considering a new multi-year aid package to Israel, we should keep in mind that, in addition to the practical benefits to both countries, the intangible benefits are also significant. ■

A Poor Choice

V’hasir et murato b’notzatah v’hishlich otah “*He will take its entrails and cast them away*” (Leviticus 1:16)

In Leviticus 1:13, we are told that the entrails of cattle are washed and burnt on the altar. In our *pasuk*, which discusses the sacrifice of birds, the entrails are cast aside. Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 3) reminds us that cattle feed from the bins of their owners whereas birds “steal” food by flying into fields and eating whatever they want. The entrails of cattle, then, are fit for use on the altar because, unlike the entrails of birds, they do not contain “stolen” food.

In his commentary on this verse, R. Moshe Alshich points out that birds were normally offered by the poor. By recording the disposal of bird entrails, the Torah teaches us that poverty is not an excuse for transgression.

Last week, Hamas and Fatah finally reached agreement on a so-called “unity government” the principles of which were arrived at weeks earlier during a meeting in Mecca. Despite the fact that international aid to the Palestinians actually increased in the past year – even though European countries and the U.S. barred direct aid to the Hamas-led P.A. government – the “unity government” agreement was designed solely to turn on the spigot of cash.

Unfortunately, the Mecca agreement does not even meet the minimal requirements set forth by the international community for the resumption of aid. Hamas has already reasserted – several times – its total refusal to recognize Israel’s right to exist and its continuing commitment to terrorism. Hamas also has refused to pledge to abide by previously negotiated Israeli-Palestinian agreements. These three basic criteria were the baseline for the resumption of international aid. The Mecca agreement falls well short.

The Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act (P.A.T.A.) which became law in December, provides the United States a mechanism by which to funnel humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people while bypassing the Hamas-led P.A. The United States must hold firm – and demand the same commitment from the international community. We can have an immediate impact by contacting our Members of Congress and asking them to sign the Nelson-Ensign letter to Secretary of State Rice or, if they’ve already signed it, by thanking them for doing so. This letter encourages the Administration to continue to abide by P.A.T.A. and to urge the rest of the world to do the same.

The leaders of the Palestinians have, for years, used the dire poverty of their people as an excuse for their transgressions. We should learn the lesson of our *parashah* and not let them get away with it one more time. ■

Keep Up the Pressure

Asher nasi yechetah “If a prince has sinned” (Leviticus 4:22)

Rashi comments on this verse that *asher* comes from *ashrei* because the generation that has such a leader is fortunate. Obviously, they are not fortunate because they have a leader who sins, but, rather, because their leader is able to admit that he has sinned unintentionally and make proper atonement.

As the international community considers a new round of sanctions against Iran, it is telling to note the reaction of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in contrast with other Iranian leaders and some in the Iranian press. While Ahmadinejad has refused to even tone down his rhetoric on the Iranian nuclear program – let alone put a halt to Iran’s illegal uranium enrichment – political leaders and clerics are beginning to see the damage he is doing to the country.

A leading cleric and close associate of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has joined critics of Ahmadinejad, who is coming under increasing criticism from Iran's political and religious authorities. Ayatollah Yousef Sanei criticized Ahmadinejad's government for unnecessarily spurring international enmity toward the Islamic republic. "We must bear in mind that not everyone is our enemy," Sanei told the Kargozaran newspaper.

The Wall Street Journal reported late last week that a new sanctions bill had been agreed to by the major powers – including Russia and China – and could be offered soon. Though they are working, the current sanctions are not tough enough to finish the job. Until Ahmadinejad comes to his senses, the world community must ratchet up the pressure by passing a new, tougher sanctions bill. ■