

APRIL 13, 2007

Parashat Tazria/Metzora

Word Play

V'chiper alehah “*And he will make expiation for her*” (Leviticus 12:7)

This *pasuk* commands the new mother to offer a sin-offering after she gives birth. This practice forces us to wonder what sin a new mother could have committed to require a sin-offering. Our Sages explain that, in the pain of childbirth, the new mother might have inadvertently sworn off bearing more children. Thus, she is obligated to offer a sin-offering for uttering a false oath. Ramban explains that, although the mother's oath is not considered binding due to the extraordinary pain influencing her, she still offers the *korban* as a self-improvement method.

The Ramban teaches us a lesson that extends past the laws of newborn mothers: our speech is important, and at times, words can have harsher consequences than actions. Words, explains the Ramban, must be understood through the motivation of the speaker – as in the case of a new mother.

In the past weeks we have heard Syrian President Bashar al-Assad talk about new peace with Israel. Sadly, his actions contradict his words. He continues to refuse to recognize Lebanon's sovereignty; declining to demarcate Syria's border with Lebanon and to open a Syrian embassy in Beirut, as called for in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1680. Syria continues to host the offices of Hamas and 10 other Palestinian terrorist groups despite Assad's May 2003 promise to then-Secretary of State Colin Powell to close them. Syria fuels the insurgency in Iraq and has strengthened its ties with Iran. How can Assad strive for peace yet simultaneously support terror and continue to meddle in Lebanon's internal affairs? His claims have come in meetings with members of the U.S. Congress and before the glare of the television cameras.

As the Ramban explained, oaths and promises made under pressure are not considered legally binding. Yet, just as the mother has an opportunity to validate her words by correcting them with a *korban*, President Assad can validate his words by acting upon them. The international community should continue pressing Syria to change its destructive policies, cease its interference in Lebanon, and follow through on its promises to cut out the cancerous terror groups it is harboring in Damascus. ■

Lack of Trust

V'amok ein mareha min ha'or “*And it's appearance is not deeper than the skin*” (Leviticus 13:4)

In his commentary on this *pasuk*, Rashi says he does not know what this phrase means – one of only 77 times in Scripture that our great teacher claims such a lack of knowledge. Why would Rashi admit that he does not know the meaning of a verse of Torah? He could have simply avoided the word or phrase – after all, his commentary doesn't cover every word of Torah. Doing so, however, would leave the impression that the meaning was obvious or simple rather than conveying the truth – that the meaning was so hidden, even Rashi couldn't figure it out. Talmud even teaches us (BT Brachot 4b) *lamad lashonchah lomar eini yodei'ah*.

It takes a great deal of humility to admit that we don't know something. Human nature, it would seem, is to arrogantly care more for one's reputation than for the truth. And yet, we think more highly of Rashi for his modesty and humility.

We all know people who are full of bluster but, when push comes to shove, demonstrate weakness of character. Humility allows us to take people at their word – a true mark of strength.

Unfortunately, we see plenty of bluster but little trustworthiness from Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah. Nasrallah has made clear that Hizballah is rearming and preparing for another fight, saying in February, “we openly declare that we have weapons, we are completing our preparedness for a greater and more dangerous stage and that we are transporting weapons to the front.” U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon told the Security Council that Hizballah's statements “are an open admission of activities that constitute a direct violation of...Resolution 1701.” Brig.-Gen. Yossi Baidatz, head of the Israeli Military Intelligence research division, recently said that Hizballah's military wing has been almost completely rehabilitated, thanks to constant arms smuggling via Syria.

Hizballah fancies itself a political movement. In reality, its utter lack of trustworthiness and willingness to ignore international law makes it nothing more than what it regarded as by the State Department: a terrorist organization. ■

Bring It

V'huvah el haCohein “And he will be brought to the priest” (Leviticus 14:2)

On the day of his purification, the leper is brought to see the priest who checks to make sure that the disease has, in fact, disappeared. At this point, the healed *m'tzarah* is responsible for providing two birds for the cleansing ritual. It is interesting to note that the Torah does not say that the *m'tzarah* “will go” to the priest – it says “he will be brought.” Ibn Ezra tells us that, once the *m'tzarah* is healed of his affliction, he will not want to bring the offerings for which he is responsible.

Ibn Ezra understood human nature. When imperiled by leprosy, the *m'tzarah* will promise to fulfill his ritual obligations – he may even fully intend to do so. But without the threat of the disease, he is likely to forget or change his mind. The Torah understands that, when we can not be trusted to act rightly on our own, we require a push in the right direction.

Time is running out to stop Iran—the leading state sponsor of terrorism—from going nuclear. The U.S. House and Senate are currently considering legislation to make a definitive statement about the American people's desire to ensure that our country is doing everything possible—through non-military means—to end activities by those countries and entities that are enabling Iran to pursue nuclear weapons. These bills (H.R. 1400 in the House and S. 970 in the Senate) tighten enforcement of existing U.S. sanctions, prohibit nuclear cooperation with Iran's biggest international nuclear partners, isolates the mullahs from international financial institutions, urges financial divestment from Tehran, and supports democracy within Iran.

Iran will not voluntarily give up its ambitions for nuclear weapons – it must be “brought to” that decision by international pressure and diplomatic and financial isolation. We should encourage our Representatives and Senators to support H.R. 1400 and S. 970, thank those who are already doing so, and ask our leaders to continue leading the world in opposing Iran's nuclear fantasy. ■