

AUGUST 20, 2007

Parashat Ki Teitzei

Common Decency

Ki kil'lat Elokim talu'i "Because a hanging body is a kil'lat to God" (Deuteronomy 21:23)

After a criminal is executed, the body is hung from a wooden beam. While the Torah commands that the body be displayed in this way, the *pasuk* goes on to explain that it should not remain on the beam overnight. Rather, the body should be buried that day because continuing such a demonstration overnight is a *kil'lat*. While obviously deriving from *k'lalah*, how should we understand this word and why should the ill-treatment of a criminal constitute a *kil'lat*?

Rashi interprets the word to mean *zilzul shel melech*. Despite his criminal conduct, the executed man's body must be brought down from the beam and buried on the same day because human beings are created *b'tzelem Elokim*. No matter what he has done or how he has been punished, even the body of a criminal is a reminder of God.

Despite Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip and the continuing rain of rockets on Israeli towns and cities, Israel has continued to treat the citizens of Gaza with humanity and concern. In the days immediately following Hamas' coup, when almost every humanitarian group had shut down due to the violence, Israel trucked thousands of tons of supplies and medicines into Gaza. With roughly half of Gaza's population utterly reliant on international aid, Israel's willingness to help the Palestinian population – despite their government's vow to destroy the Jewish state – saved countless lives. Now, The Jerusalem Post reports that Israel is considering using the upcoming *sh'mitah* year to help Palestinian farmers by importing crops from Gaza.

Israel continues to treat the Palestinians in Gaza with the respect accorded those who are *b'tzelem Elokim*. Perhaps one day, the terrorists of Hamas will extend the same respect to Israelis. ■

Taking Advantage

Hakeim takim imo "You will raise it with him" (Deuteronomy 22:4)

We are obligated to help someone whose animal has fallen with a heavy load on its back. But the Torah stipulates we will help *imo* – along with the owner. Talmud (Bava Metzia 32a) tells us that we are exempt from this commandment if the owner of the animal sits down and says, "You're commanded to do it. So you do it!"

The Torah wants us to be able to differentiate between performing a *mitzvah* and being taken advantage of. There is no requirement for us to allow our kindness to be used against us. This is something we should keep in mind in our personal lives, but it also teaches us a lesson in the international community's ongoing efforts to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

As a non-nuclear member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has legally foresworn obtaining nuclear weapons. Iran is obliged to declare all nuclear facilities and activities on its soil, and to have all of its nuclear

activities under the safeguards of the IAEA. The IAEA resolution passed in September 2005 found Iran in violation of its obligations. Iran conducted a clandestine nuclear program for nearly 20 years until it was exposed in 2002. Since these revelations, Iran has continued to block the access of IAEA inspectors at some suspect sites and refused to answer continuing questions from the IAEA. Iran has also ignored two recent U.N. Security Council imposing sanctions on the regime for its failure to end its uranium enrichment.

The United States and its allies have made repeated efforts in recent years to reach out to Iran in hopes of solving a range of disputes diplomatically, including the recent offer of wide-reaching negotiations if Tehran suspends its uranium enrichment-related activities. The formal U.S. position since the early 1980s made clear that the United States was prepared for a dialogue with authorized official parties in Iran, with all issues on the table, including Iran's role in fostering terrorism and undermining Israeli-Arab peace efforts, as well as its nuclear efforts. Iran has never accepted such a dialogue. Moreover, when Iran has entered into negotiations, such as the talks with the European Union, it has used them as a tactic to postpone and delay the imposition of sanctions, all the while aggressively expanding its nuclear infrastructure—and then bragging about having done so.

Iran has taken advantage of the world's patience and peaceful nature long enough. The international community should use every diplomatic and economic means to stop Tehran's nuclear program. And if we are invited to the negotiating table, we should remember Iran's history of deceit and delay. ■

Bashar Behaving Badly

Shalei'ach t'shalach et ha'eim "You will surely send away the mother" (Deuteronomy 22:7)

We are commanded, when taking eggs from a nest, to shoo away the mother bird. Talmud (Chulin 141a) makes it clear that this commandment applies no matter what use one might have in mind for the eggs – hence the repetition of the word *shalach*. Even if they are to be used in the fulfillment of another *mitzvah*, we are still obligated to send the mother away.

This example demonstrates the fact that one cannot do something good – even a *mitzvah* – while simultaneously doing something bad.

In July, Syrian President Bashar Assad said that his country was “prepared for just and comprehensive peace with Israel.” Since that time, Assad has made statements indicating a willingness to negotiate with Israel. While these developments are noteworthy and have been taken seriously by the Israeli government, Assad's actions undermine his words. Syria continues its military buildup along the border with Israel, continues to allow a steady flow of weapons across its border with Lebanon to the Hizballah terrorists with whom it is allied, continues to act as a politically destabilizing force in Lebanon, and continues to suspiciously block international efforts to investigate the assassination of anti-Syrian Lebanese politician Rafik Hariri.

If Bashar Assad's regime is serious about pursuing peace with Israel, they will find a willing negotiating partner in the Jewish state. But Assad must bolster his words with the force of action. ■