

MARCH 17, 2008

Parashat Tzav

L'Chayim

Im al todah yakrivenu “*If he offers it for thanksgiving*” (Leviticus 7:12)

The *korbon todah* was offered by one who had experienced an event so life-changing that an expression of gratitude was required. Rashi, in his commentary on this *pasuk*, names four types of people who should make this offering: sea and desert travelers, those released from prison, and those who recovered from serious illness. Shulchan Aruch (219:1) notes an interesting mnemonic device: *Chavush* (jail), *Yisurim* (illnesses), *Yam* (sea) and *Midbar* (desert). *Chayim!* With all the wickedness in the world, we have always been a people who celebrate and give thanks for life. When we offer a toast – on Shabbos, at weddings, or just with friends – we say *l'chayim*. We could say “cheers,” “bottoms up,” or “here’s to you.” Instead, we indicate our appreciation for life.

This respect for life carries with it two responsibilities: protecting oneself and protecting others. Both of these responsibilities are currently challenged by Hamas terrorists in Gaza and Israel is rising to those challenges. Daily Hamas rocket barrages from Gaza are destroying lives in Israeli cities and Israel must take steps to defend herself. There have been more than 4,000 Hamas rocket and mortar attacks on Israel since it left Gaza completely in 2005, and over 2000 since August alone. Obviously, as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said, Israel remains committed to “preventing a humanitarian crisis from developing.” Even at the height of the attacks, aid has continued to flow.

At the same time as Olmert committed to providing access to humanitarian aid, he made clear that Israel must take steps to protect its citizens, saying “there is no justification for demanding we allow residents of Gaza to live normal lives while shells and rockets are fired from their streets and courtyards at Sderot and other communities in the south.” A surge in rocket attacks from Gaza may force Israel to undertake increased action to defend its citizens. Israel has the right to defend itself and if the limited measures to do date are insufficient to stop the Palestinian violence, Israel may be forced to take more serious action. It is worth noting that Israel goes to great lengths to limit harm to civilians in contrast to Hamas, which cynically uses its own people as cover for its attacks against Israel.

We are rightly proud that the Jewish state takes seriously our people’s traditional respect for human life. We pray that those in positions of leadership among the Palestinians will demonstrate similar respect by stopping the rockets and taking steps toward a peaceful future. ■

Give It Up

Tzav et Aharon “*Command Aharon*” (Leviticus 6:2)

Parashat Tzav begins with a peculiar conjugation of the word meaning "command" (*tzav*). In his commentary, Rashi points out that this conjugation implies a high level of *zirus* (urging on). Rashi quotes the Tannah, R. Shimon, who says that it is particularly necessary for the Torah to urge someone on in a situation where there is a loss of money.

What does R. Shimon mean? In this instance, the Torah is speaking of the laws of the Olah sacrifice. An Olah is an animal that is totally consumed on the altar. Because no one eats any part of it, it is described as an offering "involving the loss of money." For this reason, there was a special need to charge and motivate the people to keep the laws associated with the Olah offering.

It is human nature to resist giving something up. Whether money or possessions, we like to hold tight to that which we consider "ours." The Torah understands that getting us to part with something important – even when we really ought to give it up – requires extra emphasis and urging.

As the United Nations Security Council in the past weeks overwhelmingly passed a new round of sanctions aimed at Iran's nuclear program, the world learned two troubling new pieces of information. Mohamed ElBaradei, the director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations nuclear monitor, said newly disclosed intelligence reports that Iran had secretly researched how to make nuclear weapons were of "serious concern" and would be pursued by his office. The studies were described in a briefing by Olli Heinonen, the agency's senior inspector. They included sketches and a video that appeared to have come from Iran's own military laboratories, and Mr. Heinonen said they showed work "not consistent with any application other than the development of a nuclear weapon." Furthermore, in a striking development, Tehran has built a cascade of IR-2 (or P-2) centrifuges. This advanced uranium enrichment device is three times faster than the P-1, but many times more efficient, cutting in half the time Iran needs to make the fuel for a bomb.

Getting Iran to give up its illegal nuclear program has proven difficult – and so far, it has not worked. Now is the time to redouble our efforts by strictly enforcing U.N. sanctions, encouraging states and companies to divest from and cease doing business in Iran, and by encouraging the United States to keep up the economic pressure. ■

Let's Get Together

V'eit kol ha'eidah hak'heil "Assemble the whole community" (Leviticus 8:3)

After spending the first few chapters of Leviticus discussing various sacrifices, Moshe is commanded to assemble the entire community to witness Aharon's ascension to the position of High Priest. The word *hak'heil* is in the command form, a relative rarity in Torah that nonetheless occurs elsewhere in our *parashah*. *Hak'heil* is used only two times in Torah, once in our *parashah* and once at the end of Sefer D'varim when all of Israel assembles to hear the public reading of the Torah. When Torah uses the command form, it is not to be taken lightly.

There are times when we come together of our own accord and times we are brought together by seismic events. The ongoing threats to the Jewish state should compel us all to take action – action that our leaders and fellow citizens have already begun to take.

As Qassam rockets continue to barrage Sderot and Katyusha rockets have hit Ashkelon, the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed H. Res. 951 by a vote of 404-1 expressing support for the citizens of Sderot and other Southern Israeli towns as well as placing blame squarely on Hamas for the deterioration of conditions in Gaza. Recently, Gallup conducted its annual World Affairs survey and found that 71% of Americans have a favorable view of Israel – placing the Jewish state fifth on the list behind the U.K., Canada, Germany, and Japan. The depth of support for Israel in Congress is clearly a reflection of the favorable view that average Americans have of the Jewish state. Most Americans understand that the U.S. and Israel share values of freedom and democracy and have common strategic interests.

It is time for us all to assemble. There is no better way to show our unity than by coming together as a community from June 2-4 in Washington, DC at AIPAC's annual Policy Conference. ■

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