

APRIL 28, 2008

Parashat K'doshim

Acceptance of Authority

Ish imo v'aviv tira'u “*Each man shall revere his mother and father*” (Leviticus 19:3)

The verse before our *pasuk* famously commands us to be holy because HaShem is holy. Why, then, is the next command given to respect our parents? Obviously, given its inclusion among the Ten Commandments, *kibud av v'eim* is of high importance in Judaism – but is it the key to being holy? Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 33) teaches us that, once we integrate respect for our parents into our lives, respect for God will be more immediately attainable. In other words, acceptance of authority – that we cannot live by the law of the jungle – is the first step to holiness.

Responsible governments institute laws for responsible people to follow.

Israel has shown extreme restraint in the face of ongoing rocket and other terrorist attacks. However, like every other sovereign nation, Israel has the right and duty to defend its citizens. Israel's military response in Gaza has been carefully calibrated to reduce rocket fire and ensure the safety of Israeli citizens while at the same time making every effort to limit Palestinian civilian casualties. Contrast this with the terrorists who hold power in Gaza. Since Israel withdrew from Gaza in August of 2005, approximately 4,000 Hamas rockets and mortars have landed in Israel. This year alone, from January to March of 2008, rockets and mortars have struck southern Israeli communities at a rate of more than 60 per week, resulting in nearly 200 Israeli casualties, including children. Terrorists are now firing longer-range Iranian and Syrian-supplied Katyusha rockets, threatening hundreds of thousands of Israelis and critical national infrastructure. In stark contrast to Former U.S. President Carter's claims that Hamas is prepared to accept Israel's right to “live as a neighbor next door in peace,” Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal stressed that his group would never recognize the Jewish state, the Associated Press reported. “We agree to a [Palestinian] state on pre-67 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital with genuine sovereignty without settlements but without recognizing Israel,” Mashaal said.

Hamas recognizes no authority beyond its extremist interpretation of Islamic law. There is no morality, no civility, no self-determination; only their way or the highway. While Israel answers to a very different authority – the consciences of her leadership and the democratic will of her people – she will, like any sovereign nation, not tolerate daily rocket attacks for long. ■

Is Talk Cheap?

Al tifnu el ha'elilim “*Do not turn to idols*” (Leviticus 19:4)

With its overarching theme of monotheism, the Torah contains countless warnings against idolatry. In most cases, the Torah warns us not to worship idols, yet in our *sidra* we find a different type of warning: this week, we are forbidden to “turn to” idols. What's the difference between “worshipping” and “turning to?” In his commentary, Ramban

explains that the *pasuk* charges us not to even entertain the notion that there is a benefit in considering other gods. In fact, the potential for destructive impact is so great that our sages warn us not to even look at images of idols.

While very few things in life are as clear-cut as the Torah's view of idolatry, this *pasuk* provides us with an opportunity to ask ourselves about those things in our lives that are such negative influences – the impact of which are so destructive – that we should consider no longer doing them. Even things that are not obvious sins can be harmful to us; smoking or eating certain foods, for example.

Generally, we think of dialogue between people and nations as a good thing. Talking helps us to understand one another and to work out our problems peacefully. When one party has a history of deception and bad-faith, however, we should reassess whether negotiation is of benefit or whether, in fact, it is potentially damaging. In the case of Iran, talk has been pretty cheap. The long-running dialogue between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has failed to address concerns related to Iran's undeclared nuclear activities. Iran continues to delay and obstruct IAEA efforts to account for Iran's past nuclear activity, including any covert uranium enrichment activity. An IAEA report last November found Iran is not providing active cooperation and full transparency to the agency, saying Iran's cooperation was "reactive rather than proactive."

Before deciding to enter into negotiations with Iran, the international community should consider whether such negotiations will have any benefit and should be aware of Iran's negotiating history. Choosing not to negotiate – or making certain that we only do so with our eyes open – can only prevent serious problems down the road. ■

Intent Matters

V'yareitah mei'elokecha "You will fear your God" (Leviticus 19:14)

Among the litany of commandments in our *parashah*, we are instructed not to act with deception – we cannot cause the blind to stumble or insult the deaf. In his commentary, Rashi teaches us that the phrase *v'yareita me'elokecha* is used because we may not know whether the person committing a particular act is doing so for good or bad purposes. Some actions may seem to the one who performs them to be good, but can have unintended consequences.

In our words and actions, our intent matters. Sometimes intentions are hard to discern. Other times, they are obvious to all.

Iran's intentions regarding its nuclear program are clear. Given Iran's actions, it is obvious that they are pursuing the ability to make a nuclear weapon. Given its leaders' bellicose rhetoric about destroying Israel, we must assume the darkest of intentions. There is no doubt that Iran continues to pursue the ability to highly enrich uranium (the most difficult technical component of building a nuclear weapon). In fact, Iran is very proud to admit that, in violation of three U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding they cease enrichment, the activity not only continues but is increasing in rapidity. It has begun testing more efficient, second-generation IR-2 centrifuges, able to drastically reduce the time needed to enrich uranium. New satellite photographs have also uncovered a secret site where Iran is suspected of developing long-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching targets as far away as Europe, and show that Iran is disguising its missile development as a space program, much like North Korea did over the last decade. U.N. nuclear experts have also obtained documents detailing a years-long, clandestine effort by Iran to use civilian experts as cover for nuclear warhead research.

Judaism teaches us to give people the benefit of the doubt (see Pirkei Avot 1:6, for example). If there is any doubt as to one's intentions, we are instructed to presume that a person has good intent. However, where there is no doubt that the motivation is evil, we must act. The international community must bring to bear the strongest possible economic and diplomatic sanctions. ■