

MARCH 2, 2009

Parashat Tetzaveh/Zachor

No Time to Lose

V'atah tetzaveh - "And you shall command" (Exodus 27:20)

Parashat Tetzaveh begins with God's directive that Moses command Aaron to light the *ner tamid*, the continuous flame of the Menorah in the Tabernacle. The language which the Torah uses to convey a commandment communicates not only the commandment itself, but the importance of the instruction as well. In the case of this commandment the Midrash notes that instead of telling Moses to speak to Aaron (using the verb *lomar* or *ledaber*), God instructs Moses to "command" his brother. Midrash Hagadol (Vayikra 6:2) explains, "This language [of commandment] connotes alacrity and eternity." Thus, Moses was told to command Aaron in order to impart a sense of urgency, because the Menorah had to be lit without any unnecessary delay.

While patience and measured progress are often admirable traits, some tasks carry such importance that they must be addressed as soon as possible. Today, the world faces such a task in confronting Iran's nuclear aspirations, and like Aaron lighting the Menorah in the Tabernacle, there is no time to lose.

Time is rapidly running out to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Following the recent release of an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report which stated that Iran was continuing to enrich uranium, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said: "This White House understands that, working with our allies, that this is an urgent problem that has to be addressed and we can't delay addressing." Gibbs further commented that "It does underscore the urgency with which the international community must work together to address these enrichment activities." The IAEA report also states that Iran has increased the number of centrifuges enriching uranium at its Natanz facility to 6,000 and that Iranian and Russian nuclear officials began testing the first nuclear power plant built in Iran. The United States stands at the forefront of an international effort to pressure Iran through diplomacy and sanctions to abandon its pursuit of a nuclear weapons technology. America must continue to mobilize international influence to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

If Iran achieves nuclear military capability then all international efforts will be too little, too late. Like the kindling of the Menorah in the desert, when it comes to confronting Iran there is no time to lose. ■

A Green Agenda

V'asita bigdei kodesh l'aharon - "And you shall make holy garments for Aaron" (Exodus 28:2)

How did the Israelites dispose of used priestly vestments after they were no longer serviceable? Throwing them away would have desecrated their sacred status. Jewish law prohibited giving them to the needy as the garments were holy property of the Temple and thereby forbidden for individual use (see Tosafot Sabbath 21a). Burying them would have preserved their holiness, but would have been a waste of valuable resources. The Talmud explains that the priests devised a clever and meaningful use for the old vestments: they recycled them. The Talmud in Shabbat (21a) explains that they would rip apart the used linen vestment, spin the threads into wicks, and use those wicks to provide light during the *simchat beit hasho'evah*, the special celebration that took place on the second night of Sukkot.

This ancient recycling effort serves as a modern model of innovation. Nowadays, the United States and Israel are working together on efforts that invoke this desire to preserve precious resources while serving a constructive purpose.

The U.S.-Israel Energy Cooperation Act provides funding for joint cooperative ventures between American and Israeli businesses aimed at developing alternative sources of energy. “Two million dollars...has already been allocated for this year with a significant increase expected in future years,” according to the website Israel21c. U.S.-Israel renewable energy cooperation is already in progress with companies such as Seambiotic and Better Place leading the way. “Seambiotic is the first company in the world utilizing flue gas from coal burning power stations for algae cultivation. The company aims to grow and process marine microalgae using an ecologically based environmental system to reduce air pollution and global warming. Better Place is a venture-backed company aiming to reduce global dependency on oil through the creation of an electric car network with a swappable battery.” With the growing need to free the U.S. from the grip of foreign oil, America has become increasingly proactive in its development of renewable energy sources. As one U.S. official put it, “we have a partner who brings a lot to the table. Israel is world-renowned in the field and we meet as equals.”

This American-Israeli investment in renewable energy will improve lives and conserve energy throughout the world. These actions follow the example of our forefathers in the Tabernacle, who even thousands of years ago found ways to recycle valuable resources. ■

Naturally Hostile

Vayavo Amalek vayilachem im Yisrael - “Then came Amalek and fought with Israel” (Exodus 17:8)

In this week’s additional reading of Parshat Zachor we study the commandment to remember the harm that the nation of Amalek brought upon the Children of Israel. What did Amalek do to deserve such harsh treatment from the Torah? After all, the Jewish people have had numerous adversaries throughout our history, yet none have warranted the special derision reserved for Amalek. Former Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, explains (see *Derashot El Ami* Vol. 2 pp. 596) that God’s aversion to Amalek lies in Amalek’s purely militaristic nature. “It is customary in the world between civilized nations...that before they go to war they send warnings or ultimatums to their adversaries with conditions and terms. This is not the case with Amalek. To him, all the international laws are only a small slip of paper, unworthy of his attention.” According to Rabbi Amiel, just as some people like to dance, Amalek found their ideal form of expression through aggressive acts of war.

The Torah commands us to remember the aggression of Amalek because their natural tendency to “fight first and talk later” ran counter to the desire to spread peace in the world. Nowadays it is Hamas, like ancient Amalek, who promotes a military agenda over cooperative efforts, thus making prospects for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict even more difficult.

A top Hamas official recently declared that the Palestinian terrorist group would continue to smuggle weapons into the Gaza Strip. “It’s our right to bring in everything—money and arms,” Mahmoud Zahar said in an interview. “We will not give anyone any commitment on this subject.” Recent reports suggest that Iran has redoubled its efforts to smuggle advanced weaponry to Hamas terrorists. Meanwhile, Hamas continues to fire rockets at Israeli civilians. In fact, more than four dozen Hamas rockets and mortars, including several long-range Grad missiles, have slammed into southern Israeli communities since Israel withdrew its troops from Gaza following Operation Cast Lead. These attacks continue despite the hardships that these assaults bring to the citizens of Gaza.

Hamas must reject violence, recognize Israel’s right to exist, and consent to abide by all previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements. Until Hamas does so, like the nation of Amalek, they will only succeed in demonstrating their militaristic nature at the expense of their own people. ■