



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 30, 2009

Parashat Tzav

Consistent Friendship

Ve'haish al hamizbeach...lo tichbeh – “And the fire upon the altar...it shall not go out” (Leviticus 6:5)

The theme of consistency permeates Parashat Tzav. First, the Torah states that the fire on the altar may never be extinguished – the original *ner tamid*. Next, the Torah commands the Kohanim to bring a constant supply of logs and wood to maintain the fire on the altar. Additionally, Aaron and his sons were told to maintain a constant vigil in the Tabernacle for seven straight days and nights. Finally, the Kohanim offered the twice daily service in the Tabernacle every day of the year without fail. Consistency reflects true dedication and commitment, and the consistency of the Kohanim revealed the devotion to their service.

While we have many responsibilities throughout our lives, we reflect our true passions with our consistent dedication to certain tasks. Like the service in the Tabernacle, the U.S.-Israel relationship enjoys the strength of consistency. For more than 60 years, American support for Israel has been a hallmark of U.S. foreign policy.

The United States recently reinforced its consistent support for Israel with the passing of the 2009 foreign aid appropriations to Israel. On February 25th the House of Representatives approved \$2.38 billion in security assistance for Israel as part of the fiscal year 2009 omnibus spending package. Combined with the \$170 million included in a supplemental appropriations bill passed last year, the new spending package fully funds the first year of a ten-year \$30 billion U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Foreign aid, at little more than 1 percent of the federal budget, is an essential, cost-effective tool for promoting American interests abroad and supporting our critical allies. U.S. security assistance to Israel is the most tangible way that the United States helps Israel maintain its military superiority and counters the great disparity in defense spending between Israel and potential adversaries in the Middle East. For more information on U.S. foreign aid to Israel, click [here](#).

Just as the Kohanim in the Tabernacle remained dedicated to their service, the United States has remained a consistent friend of the Jewish state. By fully funding the first year of the new MOU the U.S. has placed the next “log on the altar,” and once more demonstrated its commitment to Israel. ■

Thoughts and Actions

B'makom asher tishchat ha'olah - “In the place where the burnt-offering is slaughtered” (Leviticus 6:18)

Vayikra Rabbah (7:3) notes that “Burnt offerings were only brought [for sins] of [evil] thoughts of the heart.” Conversely, one would bring a sin offering for actual deviant actions and not just intentions. Rabbi Israel Lipkin of Salant points out the direct connection between the two offerings. When a person consumes himself with sinful thoughts it is only natural that these thoughts will ultimately grow into concrete actions. Rabbi Lipkin notes that the verse above alludes to this natural phenomenon. “In the place where the burnt-offering is slaughtered, shall the sin-offering [also] be slaughtered.” These two offerings were slaughtered in the same place because destructive actions are sure to follow harmful thoughts.

Thoughts are the precursor to any premeditated act. Thus, when one actually expresses thoughts of ill intent others have a responsibility to take action before any tangible harm can be done. Today, as Iranian leaders continue to articulate their hateful thoughts about Israel, the international community must remain cognizant that, if left unchecked, Iran's rhetoric will ultimately lead to destructive action.

Recently, at the International Conference on Palestine, held in Tehran, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated that, "Even the new president of America, who has come to power with slogans about changing...policies, is defending state terrorism by talking about unconditional commitment to Israel's security," Reuters reported. Khamenei went on to say that America and Britain were unsuitable partners for negotiation because they "committed the biggest sin in creating and supporting this cancerous tumor [Israel]." Khamenei's words must not be taken lightly. It is this very type of rhetoric which ultimately leads to violent acts. Iran already supports terrorist organizations that are responsible for the deaths of hundreds of civilians throughout the world, such as Hamas and Hizballah. As Iran continues to make progress in its nuclear weapons program it is crucial that the international community implement more stringent sanctions on the Islamic Republic before it gains the capacity to turn these thoughts of malice into catastrophic actions. For more on Iran, please visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Rabbi Lipkin rightly notes that thoughts lead to actions. As such, Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons cannot be separated from its vile rhetoric. If the international community does not increase the economic pressure on Iran, and the Islamic Republic achieves a nuclear capability, then it should not surprise any when Iran attempts to translate its thoughts of hatred into acts of violence. ■

The Power of Words

Kach et Aharon – "Take Aaron" (Leviticus 8:2)

The phrase "take Aaron" seems to imply physical action, yet Rashi notes that Moses was not intended to take these words literally. Rather, Rashi states that Moses was commanded to "take [Aaron] with words and draw him close." How does Rashi reach this conclusion? Targum Yonatan ben Uziel suggests an answer through his translation of the verse in Aramaic. He translates the phrase to mean, "Bring close Aaron, who was distanced due to the worship of the [golden] calf." Thus, rather than take physical action to bring Aaron close, Moses was commanded to approach Aaron with dialogue and return him to his rightful place as the high priest and ritual leader of the Jewish nation.

The instruction to Moses indicates a preference for the power of words over physical action. Nowadays, Israel's leaders have demonstrated an understanding of the important use of dialogue and a commitment to peaceful negotiations with Israel's adversaries.

The government of Israel recently marked the 30th anniversary of its peace treaty with Egypt, signed on March 26, 1979. This landmark treaty has served as a testament to the strength of negotiated settlement, spurring cooperation between the two countries on a wide range of issues including defense, economics and agriculture. It also serves as an example for future negotiations with the Palestinian people. Israeli Prime Minister-elect Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to resume peace talks with the Palestinians, and has stated that once he takes office his government will be a "partner for peace," the Associated Press reported. Netanyahu said that peace is a "common and enduring goal for all Israelis and Israeli governments, mine included. This means I will negotiate with the Palestinian Authority for peace." Like Israeli leaders from across the political spectrum who have signed and implemented peace agreements with Israel's neighbors in the past, the leading members of the incoming government have all expressed their desire to continue peace talks with the Palestinians.

Israel's leaders realize that, like Moses speaking with his brother Aaron, the strongest way to draw someone in is not through force or coercion. Rather, true closeness can only come from the power of words. ■