

APRIL 19, 2010

Parashat Achrei Mot - Kedoshim

A Legacy of Life

Daber el Aharon achicha – “Speak to your brother Aaron” (Leviticus 16:2)

Why does the Torah link the deaths of Elazar and Itamar with the Yom Kippur service in the Temple at the beginning of Parashat Achrei Mot? The Talmud (Yoma 5:1) explains that “In order to teach us that just as Yom Kippur brings about atonement for Israel, so too the deaths of the righteous bring about atonement for Israel.” While it seems strange that in death the righteous can bring about atonement for the nation, the Zohar states that they “are more present in this world than they were even in life.” Therefore, we come to understand that somehow, through their merit and good works, the spirit of the righteous survives after death—bringing virtue and atonement to the world.

Nowadays, it is hard to fathom the righteous having a post-mortem presence like the Zohar describes. However, in a very physical way, the virtuous spirit of some righteous people continues to live on even after they have passed away.

Hilla Abramson was a diabetic Israeli woman who recently suffered cardiac arrest and was proclaimed irreversibly brain dead. When it became clear that Ms. Abramson would not recover, the doctors approached her parents about donating her organs. According to her father Ze’ev, “We thought, like she did, that the organs would not be suitable for transplant because of the diabetes disease.” However, the doctors noted that the organs “functioned impeccably.” As *Yediot Achronot* reports, “The thing that helped the parents decide [to donate her organs] was Hilla’s account in the popular Facebook social network.” When Ms. Abramson’s parents discovered that she had been a fan of the Israeli National Transplant and Organ Donations Center on her Facebook page, they understood her wish to help save the lives of others—a wish which was realized by four people who received Ms. Abramson’s organs. Israel recognizes the powerful impact of organ donation and has passed a law giving declared organ donors priority should they ever need an organ themselves. This unique legislation highlights Israel’s high moral standards, and underscores the Talmudic ethic that “whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.”

The Talmud states that Elazar and Itamar impacted the world even after their deaths. By donating her organs, Hilla Abramson followed in their footsteps—and left a legacy of life to four grateful families. ■

Righteousness in the Law

Lo ta’asu avel bamishpat – “You shall not commit a perversion of justice” (Leviticus 19:15)

Rashi notes that while the Torah uses the phrase “*lo ta’asu avel bamishpat*” twice in chapter 19 (verses 15 and 35), the phrase actually has two different meanings. Whereas in the first instance the Torah calls for fairness within the judicial system, in the second the Torah demands individual honesty in weights and measures. Why use the same phrase for these two different concepts? S’forno (on 19:15) opines that this was meant to teach equality in upholding the law. By combining the concepts of a fair judicial system with personal honesty in weights and measures, the Torah emphasizes the value of properly enforcing the law.

Today, the United States strives to meet this ideal. However, as Congress considers new sanctions designed to curb Iran’s nuclear weapons program, more must be done to properly enforce the sanction laws which already exist.

As Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear weapons, members of Congress sent a clear message to President Obama that further sanctions are necessary to stop Iran's nuclear development. Recently, the House of Representatives and the Senate sent strong, bipartisan letters to President Obama urging him to "join with those allies who are prepared for action to immediately impose crippling sanctions on Iran." Signed by over three-quarters of the entire Congress—80 Senators and 365 House members—the letters accentuate the urgent, overwhelming and bipartisan demand that the United States lead the international community to immediately staunch the growing threat of a nuclear Iran.

That imperative to lead also demands that the United States enforce existing sanctions. While Iran's state shipping company, Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL), has changed the names and ownership of most of its vessels to evade sanctions, the Treasury Department has yet to update the blacklist that American companies use to verify compliance, *The Wall Street Journal* reports. According to a report by the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, "Iran has made more of an effort to circumvent the sanctions imposed on IRISL than the United States has made to enforce them." For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

While the United States' leadership is critical in the push for additional sanctions to stop Iran's nuclear weapons program, we must also avoid a "perversion of justice"—and properly enforce the laws already in place. ■

Friendly Disagreement

Hocheach tochiach et amitecha – “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:17)

In the same verse that the Torah states: “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor,” the text also states that “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.” Noting this juxtaposition, commentaries explain that Judaism does not consider giving a rebuke a symbol of hatred or animosity, but rather a strong sign of friendship. Ramban explains that “Because the manner of enemies is to conceal their hatred in their hearts...the [verse] states ‘and you shall surely rebuke.’” Rambam (Laws of Attitudes 6:7-8) writes that when one rebukes his friend, he must take care to do so in private: “He must rebuke him in person, and speak to him softly...the verse teaches us, ‘and you shall not bear sin because of him.’ From this we learn that it is forbidden to shame a fellow Israelite, and certainly in public.”

According to the teachings of Ramban, the recent disagreement between the United States and Israel over construction in Jerusalem actually demonstrates the especially close relationship between the two countries. However, as Ramban stated, the United States should take care to avoid rebuking its friend and ally in public.

More than three quarters of the House of Representatives and the Senate have signed letters to Secretary of State Clinton urging the administration to reaffirm the strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship and calling for any differences to be resolved amicably as befits longstanding strategic allies. The House letter, spearheaded by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and House Republican Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA) states: “We recognize that, despite the extraordinary closeness between our country and Israel, there will be differences...Our view is that such differences are best resolved quietly, in trust and confidence, as befits longstanding strategic allies.” The Senate letter, led by Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Johnny Isakson (R-GA), similarly states: “We recognize that our government and the Government of Israel will not always agree on particular issues in the peace process. But such differences are best resolved amicably and in a manner that befits longstanding strategic allies.” These letters draw attention to the fact that such public pressure on Israel actually makes efforts to restart the peace process more difficult. As long as the Palestinians and Arabs believe that they can wait for the United States to press Israel to make unilateral concessions, they lack the incentive to enter into direct talks with Israel. For more keys to the peace process, click [here](#).

While friends, and especially good friends, will at times disagree, strong allies like the United States and Israel should deal with such disagreements directly and confidentially. As Ramban notes, the best and only way to offer a constructive rebuke is by doing so quietly and in private. ■