

APRIL 26, 2010

Parashat Emor

Something to Say

Emor el hakohanim – “Say to the priests...” (Leviticus 21:1)

Normally, when the Torah states that God told Moses to convey a message to another party, the text uses the phrase “v’yidaber Hashem el Moshe l’emor, daber...” However, at the beginning of our *parashah* the Torah states “v’yomer Hashem el Moshe emor...” Why does the Torah use the word the word *emor*, “say,” instead of *daber*, “speak”? In Yevamot 114a, the Talmud explains that the word *emor* was used not only to signify that the priests should maintain their level of ritual purity, but that they must also teach their children this law. How does the use of the word *emor* indicate this additional commandment? Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that “whereas *daber* is the concise expression of a thought, *emor* is addressing the same to the mind and feeling of another person, the complete explanation of development of a thought.”

By utilizing the word *emor*, instead of *daber*, the Torah expresses the value of communicating with others in such a way that they do not simply hear us speaking to them, but that they fully understand what we are saying. Today, this lesson must inspire us to fully explain the significance of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

As members of the pro-Israel community, we have a responsibility to safeguard the special relationship between our country and Israel. When discussing the issues surrounding the U.S.-Israel relationship with our friends, families and elected officials, it is not enough to mention that the relationship benefits both countries. We must also explain the facts in such a way that the importance of the relationship is clearly understood. We must emphasize that Israel and the United States have shared a special bond since the establishment of the modern Jewish state in 1948 and we must share the fact that the two countries have developed a resilient friendship—based on shared values and interests—that transcends which political parties are in power either in Washington or Jerusalem.

We must also make sure that those with whom we are speaking understand that, as National Security Advisor General James Jones recently said, “Our military benefits from Israeli innovations in technology, from shared intelligence, from exercises that help our readiness and joint training that enhances our capabilities and from lessons learned in Israel’s own battles against terrorism and asymmetric threats.” Or more succinctly, as President Barack Obama recently put it, that “...we have a special relationship with Israel and that will not change. Our countries are bound together by shared values, deep and interwoven connections, and mutual interests.” For more on the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship, click [here](#).

When speaking about the U.S.-Israel relationship we must ensure that we do not simply *daber*, but that we *emor*. In so doing, we will help secure a strong U.S.-Israel relationship for years to come. ■

The Obligation of Enforcement

Kodoshim yihiyu l’eloheihem – “They shall be sanctified to their God” (Leviticus 21:6)

Why does the Torah use the forceful language “They shall be sanctified to their God” in describing the laws of the priests? According to Rashi, this phrase indicates that if priests wished to violate the prohibitions outlined in the

Torah, “The court shall sanctify them against their will in this.” By placing the enforcement mechanism of the court upon the priests, they understood that there were repercussions for disobeying the law. Moreover, by using a derivative of this phrase twice in the same paragraph (21:6 and 21:8), the text stresses our obligation to enforce laws.

The prominence which the Torah places on enforcing biblical laws reminds of the need to implement our nation’s laws today. In fact, the immediate need to enforce some laws, such as sanctions designed to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program, is critical.

As Tehran recently began lobbying the United Nations Security Council to oppose new steps against the Islamic Republic over its illicit nuclear program, the United States must enforce the rule of law and implement the sanctions which are currently in place. One way in which the administration could have an immediate impact is by implementing current law and enforcing the Iran Sanctions Act—originally passed in 1996—sanctioning foreign energy companies investing more than \$20 million in Iran’s energy sector. Sanctioning just one of these companies would have a chilling effect on the others and would be a huge setback for Iran’s future economic outlook. Meanwhile, as successive American administrations have failed to enforce sanctions law against Iran and companies doing business in Iran, the federal government has awarded \$107 billion in contracts and grants to more than 70 companies that are doing business in Iran, *The New York Times* reported in March. Additionally, despite designating Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity in 2007, the United States has failed to enforce sanctions on the Guard. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Like the ancient Jewish courts, which were obligated to enforce the law, the United States must implement those sanctions which are American law. With sanctions providing the best chance of peaceably convincing Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program, this obligation of enforcement cannot wait. ■

Unholy War

L’nefesh lo yitama – “He shall not defile himself for the dead” (Leviticus 22:1)

The Torah states that by coming into direct contact with a dead body, a priest would become ritually impure and ineligible for the Temple service. For this reason, the Torah states that priests were commanded to avoid any situation that might compromise their sanctity. Explaining this unusual stricture, the Sefer HaChinuch (commandment 287) writes: “The root of this commandment lies in the fact that the priests were chosen for the service of God...for this reason, they were distanced from the dead...” By barring a priest who had had contact with the dead from serving in the Temple, the Torah clearly defines Judaism as a religion which disdains the sanctification of death.

While Judaism, and the Jewish state, rejects that death is a holy endeavor, Hamas has long defined sanctity in terms of its call for holy war, the use of human shields, and its attempts to kidnap and kill innocent Israelis.

Hamas was founded in the late 1980s with the self-proclaimed goal of the destruction of Israel and the establishment of a Muslim theocracy in its place. During the past 20 years, Hamas has killed hundred of Israelis and Americans in suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks inside Israel. Today, Hamas has taken control of Gaza and turned the area into a launching pad for terrorist activity—firing thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians while holding Israeli Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit in captivity without visits from the International Red Cross. Kaled Mashaal, Hamas’ exiled leader, recently vowed to capture more Israeli soldiers to use as bargaining chips for the release of Palestinian prisoners. Further, Hamas’ charter is filled with anti-Semitic language. The Charter proudly states that “The Day of Judgment will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees...The stones and trees will say O Muslims, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.” For more on Hamas, click [here](#).

While Hamas promotes kidnapping, murder and terrorism in the name of a holy war, as our *parashah* makes clear, true holiness never lies in the sanctification of death. ■