

MAY 2, 2011

Parashat Emor

Useless Immersion

Whoever touches any swarming thing (Leviticus 22:5)

איש אשר יגע בכל שרץ (ויקרא כב:ה)

The Torah prohibits a priest who had touched any swarming animal (*sheretz*), and thus became ritually impure, from serving in the Tabernacle until he “bathe[s] his flesh in water” (22:6); dunking in the *mikvah* in order to restore his ritual purity. Yet, what if the priest entered the *mikvah* while still holding onto the animal? He would certainly remain impure. The water cannot purify someone still holding the very item rendering him impure! This scenario demonstrates the concept of a seemingly repentant person who still engages in his old impure behaviors so well that it appears throughout rabbinic literature. Why? As the Talmud (Ta’anit 16a) states: “Said Rabbi Ada bar Ahava: A sinner who confesses but does not change his ways, to what can he be compared? To one who immerses with a swarming animal in his hand—for even were he to immerse forever, his immersion would not matter.”

By using the metaphor of someone who holds the *sheretz* while in the *mikvah*, the Talmud emphasizes the impossibility of doing two contradictory things at the same time. Yet today, by claiming to seek peace with Israel while also agreeing to form a unity government with a group dedicated to the Jewish state’s destruction, that is exactly what the Palestinian Authority (PA) is doing.

Recently, leaders of Fatah and Hamas announced an agreement aimed at ending years of strife between the two Palestinian factions, [The New York Times](#) reported. Paradoxically, while the PA claims that it is still willing to negotiate with the Israel, Hamas has clearly said that it will not seek peace with the Jewish state. Even as [Ynetnews.com](#) reported that “Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said that he will continue to negotiate with Israel and that ‘the new government and the political contracts are two completely different matters,’” Mahmoud Zahar, a top Hamas leader, rejected talks with Israel. “Our plan does not involve negotiations with Israel or recognizing it,” he said. In Hamas’ view, according to Zahar, “It will be impossible for an interim government to take part in the peace process with Israel.” As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other U.S. officials have said, the United States government should not deal with any Palestinian government that includes Hamas unless the group renounces violence, recognizes Israel and agrees to accept the previous obligations of the PA. The U.S. must refuse to recognize or provide aid to any government that includes Hamas until they take these steps. For more on the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation, click [here](#).

Claiming to desire peace with Israel while reconciling with Hamas is as useful as immersing oneself in the waters of the *mikvah* while still clutching the *sheretz*. Unfortunately, because the PA has chosen to take such an action, getting back to the negotiating table just became even more difficult. ■

National Compassion

It and its young (Leviticus 22:28)

אותו ואת בנו (ויקרא כב:כה)

Although Jewish law permits the slaughter of animals for human consumption, the Torah prohibits slaughtering an animal and its offspring in the same day. Explaining the underlying nature of this commandment, the Chinuch (commandment 313) writes that “This is to establish in our hearts the attribute of compassion, and to distance from us

the attribute of stubbornness, which is a negative trait. Therefore, even though God permitted us animals for our sustenance, God commanded us not to kill an animal and its young on the same day, in order to establish in us the attribute of compassion.”

The Talmud (Yevamot 79a) notes that compassion is such a fundamental aspect of our national character that the Jewish people can be identified by this trait. In our modern world, despite provocation and hostility from Hamas, Israel continues to act with compassion by taking significant steps to improve the Gazan populations’ quality of life.

This national ethic of compassion is guiding the Israeli government to help sustain the people of Gaza even as their democratically-elected Hamas government seeks the destruction of the Jewish state. In fact, Israel recently [announced](#) that it was sponsoring more than 120 infrastructure projects in the coastal region. To develop the approved health, education, water, sewage, agriculture, housing and infrastructure projects, of which 19 have been completed and 50 are being implemented, 1,226 truckloads delivered more than 50,000 tons of materials to the coastal strip. While Israel is often incorrectly accused of causing a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, in fact the opposite is true. Despite Hamas’ ongoing rocket attacks against Israeli civilians, the Jewish state imports thousands of tons of food, clothing and supplies to Gaza each week. According to [Ha’aretz](#), Deputy Director of the Red Cross in the Gaza Strip Mathilde Redmatn recently confirmed this fact, saying that there “is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza.”

While Hamas continues to hold Gilad Shalit in captivity and fire mortars and rockets at Israeli civilians, the Jewish state acts with the compassion of which the Talmud mentioned—ensuring that needed materials, fuel and energy continue to reach the people of Gaza. ■

The Ultimate Sacrifice

And I will be sanctified (Leviticus 22:32)

וּנְקַדְשֵׁתִי (וַיִּקְרָא כַּבֵּ:לֵב)

With the phrase “And I will be sanctified,” the Torah communicates the painful prospect of making the ultimate sacrifice for one’s faith. Although we are normally enjoined from giving our lives for our faith (See Leviticus 18:5—“and you shall live by them”), during times of persecution we are actually commanded to make such a sacrifice. On the prohibition, “And you shall not desecrate My holy name” (22:32), Rashi hauntingly comments: “Give yourself over [for death], and My name will be sanctified.” Unfortunately, throughout the centuries our people have had all too many opportunities to make such a sacrifice *al kiddush Hashem*—in the sanctification of God’s name—choosing to give their lives rather than abandon their faith or their nation.

This year, Parashat Emor lies at a critical point on the modern Jewish calendar, marking the Shabbat between Yom Hashoah V’hagvurah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, and Yom Hazikaron, Israel’s Day of Remembrance for fallen soldiers. On both days we honor and remember those who gave their lives *al kiddush Hashem*. Yet, in giving thanks for their sacrifice, we must also recognize the different types of sacrifices they made.

During the dark days of the Holocaust, Jews across Europe were systematically slaughtered at the hands of a vicious and ruthless regime. Trapped without anywhere to flee, 6 million Jews—a third of the world’s Jewish population—were brutally murdered. The Nazis killed Jews in horrific ways, by massacres such as Babi Yar and in the death camps. Helpless to defend themselves, Jews walked to the gas chambers with the words of the *Shema* on their lips. The genocidal murder of Europe’s Jews clearly demonstrated to the world the vital need for a safe Jewish refuge. Yet, since the birth of the modern state of Israel in May of 1948, over 22,600 men and women have given their lives in defense of the Jewish state. They too died *al kiddush Hashem*. Their sacrifice, though, came out of strength and determination to ensure that the Jewish people would have a safe haven of their own; so that the Jewish people’s sacrifice could never again be forced upon us as it was in the dark and horrifying days of the Holocaust.

On Yom Hashoah V’hagvurah and Yom Hazikaron we honor those who gave their lives *al kiddush Hashem*. We must never forget those brave souls who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the Jewish nation. May their memories be a blessing to us all. ■

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