

APRIL 24, 2011

Parashat Kedoshim

A Culture of Violence

You shall not curse the deaf (Leviticus 19:14)

לא תקלל חרש (ויקרא יט:יד)

According to Rabbeinu Nissim (Drashot Haran, number 12), we generally assume that the commandments prohibiting negative behavior are designed to protect the victim. Yet, if it were just that simple then prohibitions like the one found in this week's *parashah* against cursing the deaf would be unnecessary. After all, someone who is deaf cannot hear a curse, and thus cannot be affected by it. But, from this commandment we learn a valuable lesson, that prohibitions against destructive behavior are not only intended to protect the victim, but also to protect the perpetrator who denigrates himself through his actions.

The person who curses the deaf may believe that his actions weaken another person, but ultimately he has damaged himself far more. The same is true of Hamas' actions in Gaza. As recent events demonstrate, the culture of violence promoted by Hamas has come back to weaken the radical Islamic regime.

For decades, Hamas has glorified acts of violence, terrorism, murder and kidnapping against the Israeli people. Recently, though, Hamas found itself a victim of its own culture of violence when a radical Al Qaeda-linked group kidnapped and murdered Vittorio Arrigoni, an Italian activist who had been living in Gaza for years and working with the pro-Palestinian International Solidarity Movement. Hamas' response represented the height of irony when, "Ihab al-Ghusein, a Hamas spokesman, called [the murder] a 'heinous crime which has nothing to do with our values, our religion, our customs and traditions,'" [Al Jazeera](#) reported. However, a group that is responsible for the recent killing of 16 year old [Daniel Viflic](#)—who, as [Ha'aretz](#) reported, died of wounds incurred after "Gaza militants launched an anti-aircraft missile at a school bus"—and continues to hold Israeli Defense Forces soldier Gilad Shalit—who was kidnapped from inside of Israeli territory—prisoner, can hardly be believed when they claim that kidnapping and murder have nothing to do with their values. For more on Hamas, click [here](#).

After many years of espousing violence against Israel, Hamas now finds that it cannot control the culture that it has fostered. Just as the Torah warned, the perpetrator harms himself too, and Hamas—in cursing Israel—is harming itself and the Palestinian people living under its rule by continuing to instill in them the virtues of violence. ■

Perversion of Justice

You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment (Leviticus 19:15)

לא תעשו עול במשפט (ויקרא יט:טו)

Maimonides (Laws of Sanhedrin 20:1) interprets the phrase "you shall do no unrighteousness in judgment" as a clear prohibition to judges against perverting the law by wrongly finding the guilty innocent or the innocent guilty. Yet, S'forno (on 19:15) sees this verse as warning against a subtler, more sinister judicial behavior: "That [the judge] should not be soft to this [plaintiff] and harsh to the other." Even though the judge might convince himself that the judgment itself was unbiased, treating one party more harshly than the other is, in and of itself, a perversion of the judicial process that makes finding the truth impossible.

By forbidding judges from favoring one party over another, the Torah ensures that the judicial process results in a fair outcome. Because those people who investigated Israel's actions and drafted the Goldstone Report denied Israel this simple right, the Senate has appropriately requested that the U.N. rescind the biased report.

Recently, the United States Senate passed Senate Resolution 138 by unanimous consent, calling on the United Nations secretary general to rescind U.N. support for the Goldstone Report and take no further action against Israel under its recommendations. The [resolution](#), sponsored by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Jim Risch (R-ID), specifically notes that the U.N. Human Rights Council “prejudged the outcome of the fact finding mission by mandating that it investigate ‘violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the occupying power, Israel, against the Palestinian people.’” In addition, the fact finding mission, “downplayed the overwhelming evidence that Hamas deliberately used Palestinian civilians and civilian institutions as human shields against Israel and deliberately targeted Israeli civilians with rocket fire for over eight years prior to the operation.” The Senate also urged “U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon to help ‘reform’ the Human Rights Council ‘so that it no longer unfairly, disproportionately, and falsely criticizes Israel on a regular basis,” [Agence France Presse](#) reported. To learn more about the Goldstone Commission's Report, and Judge Goldstone's retraction, click [here](#).

The Torah reminds us that treating disputants unfairly, as the U.N. Human Rights Council did, produces flawed and biased results, like the Goldstone Report. As members of the pro-Israel community, we should recognize the efforts of the Senate to correct this perversion of justice, and contact our Senators to thank them for their support. ■

True Friendship

And you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)

ואהבת לרעך כמוך (ויקרא יט:יח)

The commandment, “And you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” is often referred to as one of the greatest *mitzvot*. Yet, commentators have struggled for generations to define its true meaning. Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov explained that he never comprehended the level of love between friends that the Torah requires until he overheard a conversation between a farmer and his friend. “Do you love me?” the farmer asked. “I love you a great deal,” his friend responded. “Do you know what I'm missing?” the farmer asked. “How would I know that?” his friend wondered. “If you don't know what I'm missing, how can you say that you love me?” From this question we can see that true friendship stems from a desire to not just support a friend in times of need, but to know what our friends need and supply whatever that may be (see Ma'ayanah shel Torah, Vayikra p. 119).

Applying Rabbi Moshe Leib's definition of friendship, we can see that the United States has consistently demonstrated that it loves the Jewish state, and is a friend of Israel in the truest sense.

Today, Israel faces growing security threats on numerous fronts. From missiles and mortars from Hamas and Hizballah to the threat of a nuclear Iran, Israel's security needs have never been more challenging. And, as Israel's needs have grown in response to these threats, so has American support of Israel's defense. In a recent joint press conference with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates [said](#), “I cannot recall a time during my public life when our two countries have had a closer defense relationship. The U.S. and Israel are cooperating closely in areas such as missile defense technology, the Joint Strike Fighter, and in training exercises such as Juniper Stallion—cooperation and support that ensures that Israel will continue to maintain its qualitative military edge.” Later, Gates elaborated on that sentiment by stating that, “I don't believe that the security relationship between the United States and Israel has ever been stronger than it is right now. And the steps that we have taken in the last two years in terms of, just as one example, collaborating together on missile defense, I think are without precedent.” For more on U.S.-Israel defense and homeland security cooperation, click [here](#).

As Israel continues to face ever growing security threats, the United States stands firmly next to its friend through financial support, technical capabilities and joint operations. Just as Rabbi Leib explained, by understanding what Israel needs and providing it, America demonstrates that we, as a nation, are a true friend to the Jewish state. ■