

FEBRUARY 7, 2011

## Parashat Tetzaveh

### Proper Leadership

**And you shall command (Exodus 27:20)**

**ואתה תצוה (שמות כז:כ)**

The Midrash explains that God punished Moses by removing his name from this week's *parashah* because Moses insolently suggested that God erase him from the Torah. "For Moses said before the Holy One, regarding [his demand that God forgive] the nation for the sin of the golden calf, 'and if [you do] not [forgive them], erase me from the book that You have written (Exodus 32:32)'" (Midrash Agadah). Yet, it was through his remarkable demand for God to forgive the people for their sin—placing the Israelites' interests ahead of his own and refusing to serve as the source of the nation's rebirth (see 32:10)—that Moses demonstrated his incredible leadership.

It is through the lens of Moses' actions that we must view the precarious situation in Egypt. When the dust settles, whoever emerges in control of Egypt must heed this powerful example and commit to putting the interests of the Egyptian people ahead of any personal agenda.

Over the past several weeks the world has been captivated by the mass rallies taking place in Egypt protesting the authoritarian rule of President Hosni Mubarak. While Mubarak has denied his people basic democratic rights, under Mubarak Egypt has also maintained a pro-American and pro-Western orientation and expressed a firm commitment to maintaining the peace treaty with Israel. It is with these past three decades of peace in mind that the prospect of Mubarak's removal raises serious concerns in Israel, where government officials fear that Egypt may fall to the destructive leadership of Islamic extremists opposed to the existence of the Jewish state, the [Associated Press](#) reported. "In a state of chaos, an organized Islamic group can take over a country. It has happened. It happened in Iran," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "A takeover of oppressive regimes of extreme Islam violates human rights, grinds them to dust ... and in parallel also pose a terrible danger to peace and stability." For more on the situation in Egypt, click [here](#).

True leaders do not see their people as pawns that allow them to maintain power, nor do they see them as tools to advance their goals of fundamentalism and religious extremism. Rather, like Moses, they see themselves as servants of those they lead. While the world waits with baited breath to see what will happen, one thing is certain: the best path forward is always the one where the government is unwavering in its commitment to serve the needs of its citizens. ■

### Transforming Tragedy

**Bring close to you Aaron your brother (Exodus 28:1)**

**הקרב אליך את אהרן אחיך (שמות כח:א)**

As Moses' brother, and one of the most influential Israelites in the Exodus, Aaron appeared to be the obvious choice to serve as high priest. Yet, the Midrash wonders whether he might have been the absolute wrong choice. After all, the Torah suggests that God wished to destroy Aaron for his role in the construction of the Golden Calf (see Deuteronomy 9:20). However, Midrash Hagadol suggests that "[f]or this reason God [specifically] told Moses, 'Bring [him] close to you,'" insinuating that by serving as the high priest—who brought forgiveness and atonement to the Jewish people—Aaron would personify the possibility of turning tragedy into an opportunity for growth.

Rather than punishing Aaron for his sinful behavior, God chose instead to use him as a model for the power of transformation. Nowadays, an Israeli named Yuval Roth is following in Aaron's footsteps by using his own suffering as a means of bridging the divide between Israelis and Palestinians, reminding us once again of the opportunities life hands us to persevere—to become the best version of ourselves.

Following the brutal kidnapping and murder of his brother Udi at the hands of Hamas terrorists, Yuval Roth found himself embittered and angry, [CNN](#) recently reported. Yet, instead of allowing his pain to consume him, he channeled his anger into peace. “I heard an interview on Israeli radio with a man who lost his son in the same way that I lost my brother,’ Roth said. ‘After the interview, I called him ... and he said he had an idea to establish a group to encourage dialogue between bereaved families from both sides, Israelis and Palestinians.’” That phone call started Roth on a path towards creating Derech Hachlamah (“The Road to Recovery”), an organization that recruits Israelis to drive sick Palestinians into Israel for desperately needed medical treatment. The organization, which now boasts over 200 volunteers, drove an estimated 55,000 miles in 2010 alone. “I lost my brother, but I didn’t lose my head,” Roth said.

Yuval Roth followed in Aaron's legacy to create his own, stating that “This activity gives me an essence for life.” Indeed, his work celebrates the beauty of humanity; the ability to appreciate one another, to give back, to forgive, and ultimately to change ourselves for the better. ■

## A Foundation of Trust

**And they shall take the gold (Exodus 28:5)**

**והם יקחו את הזהב (שמות כח:ה)**

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Many commentators ponder how Moses knew that he could trust the *chachmei lev* with the gold and valuable fabrics necessary for the weaving of the priestly garments. Ibn Ezra (on 28:5) comments that they “are reliable,” while Ba'al Haturim (on 28:3) explains that the *gematriya* of the words *chachmei lev* is the same as the word *yirat* (which connotes fear of heaven). The implication is that the wisdom of the *chachmei lev* stemmed from their righteousness and their fear of God, and that therefore Moses could entrust the donations of the people in their hands because “wisdom begins with the fear of God” (Psalms 111:10).

Without the ability to trust the artisans with precious goods, the priestly garments may have never been created. It is that type of trust that the United States must verify as it reconsiders aid to Lebanon. In light of the new Hizballah-backed Lebanese prime minister-designate, and the governing coalition that he has been tasked with forming (which will almost certainly include positions for Hizballah), the U.S. must decide whether the emergent custodians of the state can be trusted with valuable foreign aid.

In recent years the United States has spent millions of dollars promoting a pro-western agenda in Lebanon. Now, with Lebanon firmly under the political control of Hizballah, an Iranian-backed terrorist network which has killed more Americans than any terrorist group other than al-Qaeda, that policy is being reevaluated. According to the [Detroit News](#), “the administration has begun a broad review of political, economic and military assistance to Lebanon in light of the collapse of a U.S.-backed government...The Obama administration will probably cut or realign that aid if Hizballah takes over key ministries under a new prime minister, Najib Mikati, who has the backing of Hizballah.” With Hizballah controlling the Lebanese government, and as many as 60,000 short- and long-range rockets aimed at Israel, the United States is correct to reassess this aid. For more on Hizballah and Lebanon, click [here](#).

Moses only placed the treasure donated by the nation in the hands of those people that could truly be trusted. As Lebanon's brief existence as a Western-leaning democracy seems severely threatened, the United States must carefully reevaluate whether it can rely on the new Lebanese government to use American funds to further the causes of democracy and freedom. That investment depends on a strong foundation of trust. ■