

MARCH 14, 2011

Parashat Tzav - Zachor

True Intentions

The burnt offering...upon the altar all night (Leviticus 6:2) העלה...על המזבח כל הלילה (ויקרא ו:ב)

In explaining the laws of the burnt offering, the Torah states that the sacrifice must remain “on the flame...all night until the morning.” Ohr Hachayyim, in an extended essay on 6:2, uses the description of the burnt offering to evoke powerful imagery of the long history of Jewish suffering, stating that we are the sacrifice that has burned “all night”—for thousands of years—on the “altar” of exile: “This is the exile of the Ishmaelites – fortunate is he who did not see them enslave and embitter the lives of Israel! It is not enough that they do not pay us [for our toil], but they continue to pursue us...they continue to make claims against what we don’t have...these are the ‘ashes consumed by the fire’, the fire of the nations...”

Ohr Hachayim’s view of the Jewish diaspora was undoubtedly influenced by his experiences in the late 17th and early 18th century Morocco, a time when in many parts of the world being Jewish may have felt like being “burned on the altar.” Yet, through the generations, as Morocco and other governments have changed their policies towards the Jewish people, the threat we as Jews feel on a daily basis has subsided, and in many places ceased. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for our Israeli brothers and sisters who, despite Palestinian Authority (PA) efforts to rehabilitate Hamas’ image, must remain vigilant of the government in Gaza which is committed to the destruction of Israel.

The PA has recently begun a campaign to remove Hamas from the U.S. and European Union (EU) list of terror organizations in an attempt to pave the way for the Islamist movement to join a Palestinian unity government, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. According to [Agence France Presse](#), Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal has also called for reconciliation with the PA, but stated that it should be “based on ‘jihad’, or struggle, against the Jewish state... ‘The first step (to liberating Jerusalem from Israeli occupation) is refusal to negotiate with Israel... and to establish a new, reconciled Palestinian position based on jihad.’” This new PA initiative comes despite Hamas’ refusal to accept three American, EU, Russian and UN demands: that it recognize Israel, that it cease all terrorist activities and that it abide by previous Israeli-PA agreements. For more on Hamas, click [here](#).

As the imagery of the burnt offering reminds us of the long, tear-stained history of Jewish persecution, let us not forget Hamas’ true intention: the elimination of the Jewish state. ■

Keeping the Fire Lit

And the fire upon the altar shall be kept burning (Leviticus 6:5) והאש על המזבח תוקד בו (ויקרא ו:ה)

Our *parashah* describes the original *ner tamid*, the eternal flame which remained lit upon the altar, which is the inspiration for the *ner tamid* we find in many synagogues today. While the modern *ner tamid* is often electrically powered, the ancient one required a great deal of work and a great deal of wood to keep the fire constantly burning. As Ramban (on 6:6) explained, “God commanded that they [the priests] be diligent in this matter and place a great amount of wood and fuel so that the fire burnt continuously all day and night...If they grew lazy and the fire was extinguished, they violated a negative commandment.”

Ramban's commentary highlights the fact that, amazingly, in the thousands of years that have passed since the time of the Temple we have yet to find a better source of energy than burning natural resources. Hopefully, a recently held conference in Israel will help promote innovative, renewable sources of energy.

For the fourth consecutive year, hundreds of people from all over the world traveled to Eilat to learn about possible collaboration in Israel's burgeoning clean-tech industry. Run by the city's municipality, the Eilat-Eilat Renewable Energy Conference offered three days of "networking, seminars and expositions for anyone and everyone interested in Israeli energy technologies - from banks and governments to utility companies and entrepreneurs," the website [Israel21c](#) reported. Conference attendees also had the opportunity to tour ground-breaking Israeli energy sites, including the Arava Power installation at Kibbutz Ketura, Aora's massive "flower" solar collector in the Arava desert, and Neot Smadar's passive cooling tower. In addition, EUREKA—an intergovernmental organization representing 40 countries that promote industrial innovation, research and development—announced at a meeting held in conjunction with the conference, a new €33 million fund to drive research and development projects including renewable energy, biotechnology and industrial manufacturing, [The Wall Street Journal](#) reported.

In ancient times, keeping the altar's fire kindled required hard work and the consumption of precious natural resources. With Israeli clean-tech companies working to advance the field of renewable energy, one day soon the world could be able to "keep the fire lit" without burning anything at all. ■

Oppressing the Defenseless

And he struck the hindmost, all that were weak (Deuteronomy 25:18) (דברים כה:יח)

Every year on the Shabbat before Purim we recall the attack of Amalek against the Children of Israel as they left the desert. We read how instead of attacking head-on (as Egypt did), Amalek attacked at our weakest point. In response, God commanded the Jewish people to remember the attack and destroy Amalek. Why such a severe retaliation? According to the Midrash (Pesikta Rabati 13), "God said, 'I will prevent Amalek from doing precisely this very thing [destroying the Jewish nation] in the future' ...for it was clear and revealed to God how [Haman, the descendant of] Amalek would in the future decree [to kill] 'from child to elder, woman and child on one day'" (Esther 3:13).

By deliberately attacking the most vulnerable members of the Jewish people, Amalek demonstrated its penchant for preying on the weak. With the world contemplating the possibility of Iran acquiring weapons of mass destruction, we cannot forget that Iran too, like Amalek, shows a proclivity for attacking the defenseless.

Iranian attacks on unarmed civilians are increasing. [Reuters](#) reports that in response to recent demonstrations in Tehran, "Riot police attacked protesters with batons and electric shocks." Additionally, two people were killed and many more were arrested during a rally in February, the first major protest since the Revolutionary Guards unleashed a wave of violence in December 2009. According to [CNN](#), the harsh government crackdown followed several lawmakers' calls "for the execution of two opposition leaders for inciting the demonstrations."

In comments to the Israeli cabinet in early March, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took note of the massacres in Libya and underscored the brutality of recent events in Iran: "Indeed, there is another regime that massacres its people, tramples human rights and exports terrorism around the world, and this regime is developing nuclear weapons. This regime is that of the ayatollahs in Iran. And to the same degree that there is moral clarity today regarding the need to warn the Libyan ruler...against perpetrating crimes against humanity...there must be the same determined international action against the...brutal regime in Iran." For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Amalek was singled out among the nations who attacked the Israelites in the Bible because of their harshness towards the weak and their determination to destroy the Jewish people. We must remember these attributes as we encourage diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The need for international action is, as Netanyahu said, "not just for the rights of the Iranian people but for the security of the entire world." ■

Sermon tidbits are intended for your use without attribution. Please feel free to use some or all of the material. Although it is not necessary, it is appreciated if copies of sermons or articles that use the ideas presented here are sent to synagogue@aipac.org.