

MAY 7, 2012

Parashat Emor

Acting with Compassion

It and its young (Leviticus 22:28)

אותו ואת בנו (ויקרא כב:כח)

There are many *mitzvot* relating to animal kindness, including the commandments to refrain from slaughtering an animal and her young on a single day (22:28), and to send away a mother bird before taking chicks from her nest (Deuteronomy 22:6). Nachmanides (see his commentary to Deuteronomy 22:6) explains the underlying rationale for both *mitzvot* is not to focus on the animals specifically, but instead to instill a sense of compassion in our hearts. “The reason for both of them is that we not have a cruel heart and [act] without compassion...rather, [we are] prevented [from doing these acts] to teach us to be compassionate and not cruel...”

The very type of compassion promoted by the commandments regarding animal kindness is now evident in groups of Israelis and Americans who constantly work together to promote humanitarian projects and express concern for those in need.

A joint American-Israeli humanitarian project recently equipped 1,000 Arabs living in the Palestinian Authority town of Tulkarem with hearing aids, [Israel21c](#) reported. While there are many tools and devices that can help a child who is genetically deaf go on to live a normal life, the \$1,000 price of a hearing aid can be equal to the monthly income for a family in the West Bank. Seeing the need for support, the American Friends of the Sheba Medical Center appealed to the Starkey Hearing Foundation to donate assistive hearing devices, along with a year’s supply of batteries, to a group of Palestinians in need. Physicians for Human Rights in Israel located those in need and a team of 20 Israeli doctors, hearing specialists, and representatives from the U.S. based foundation, traveled to Tulkarem to do fittings. They later returned to distribute the hearing aids, answer questions and train users. Moreover, they plan to oversee maintenance checks in the future. Israeli and American specialists showed deep compassion to a population that greatly needed these hearing aids and utilized their resources and skills to assist. This small act of kindness by Americans and Israelis is one of the many humanitarian projects coordinated on a monthly basis. For more on America-Israeli shared values, click [here](#).

The Torah instructs us to act with kindness towards all life to instill the attribute of compassion in our hearts. This message has been clearly received by the Israeli doctors and their American sponsors whose sense of compassion compelled them to help Arabs in need. ■

Communal Power

And I will be hallowed... (Leviticus 22:32)

ונקדשתי... (ויקרא כב:לב)

Our *parashah* reveals the importance of Jewish communal prayer. Extrapolating on the phrase, “but I will be hallowed among the Children of Israel,” (22:32) the Talmud (Berachot 21b) derives that, “any prayer of holiness cannot be recited with less than ten [people present].” Therefore, traditionally we only recite the *Kaddish*, *Kedushah* and other communal prayers, as well as read from the Torah, in the presence of a *minyan*. From this rule we derive

that when we gather together, we have the power to represent the entire nation—the Children of Israel. Conversely, without the necessary critical mass, we can only act as individuals instead of as a connected community.

The traditional requirement of a *minyan* for certain prayers highlights the power of our collective voice. This idea not only applies to worship, but also to the potency of our collective advocacy on behalf of a safe and secure Israel.

Whether we call it temple or shul, for American Jews, our synagogues are the central address for the expression of our Jewish identity. We gather here to pray, to learn and to connect. We celebrate life's milestones and remember lives lived. Throughout our modern history, America's synagogues have also been at the forefront of activism. We care about our community and the world, and we want to make a meaningful difference. Here we have the unique opportunity to join together and help Israel become a stronger part of the American Jewish identity. We can become pro-Israel activists not only as individuals, but in the powerful context of our community, combining our strengths, capabilities and connections to advocate on behalf of the Jewish state and enhance the U.S.-Israel relationship. Imagine what we could accomplish. How many more of us could speak as advocates to our country's representatives? How many more pro-Israel supporters could join together at political functions? How many more letters could we send or phone calls could we make? The options are endless. We come together at synagogue to study history, carry on beautiful traditions and explore our Jewish identities. But, it can also be where we come together as Jewish Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike to enact public policy that secures both America and Israel.

Just as we traditionally cannot recite the *Kaddish*, *Kedushah* and other powerful communal prayers alone, our political activism becomes much stronger when we use the unique bond of the congregation to advocate on behalf of Israel. ■

Properly Placing Blame

And let all that heard him lay their hands (Leviticus 24:14) (וּסְמְכוּ כָּל הַשְּׁמָעִים אֶת יָדֵיהֶם (וַיִּקְרָא כַּד:י"ד))

According to the Torah, members of the court were required to “place their hands” upon the head of one who publicly cursed God before sentencing the blasphemer to death. What was the significance of this action? Rashi (24:14) explains that the act showed that the blasphemer committed the crime, and that he alone was responsible for having brought the penalty. Although members of the court sentenced him, “They said to him, ‘your blood is upon your head, and we shall not be punished for your death, for you brought this upon yourself.’”

Like the members of the court who refused to accept responsibility for the blasphemer's death, forcing him instead to be accountable for his crime, the international community must clearly convey that Syrian President Bashar Assad is personally responsible for the crimes against his people.

The Syrian regime continues to viciously attack the growing protest movement within the country while maintaining its support for terrorist groups. Recently, thousands of Syrians protested to denounce persistent violence by President Bashar Assad's regime. According to [Agence France Presse](#), only hours after a new U.N. call for all sides to respect a truce, regime mortar fire killed another ten civilians and clashes with rebels killed 12 troops. These were among the 24 people killed in Syria in the single day of May 1. U.N. chief Ban Ki-moon said it was vital that government and opposition alike cooperate fully with a hard-won U.N. observer force as it fans out in its mission to shore up the ceasefire agreement that took effect on April 12. Yet, despite his appeal, human rights monitors reported no let-up in the violence. In fact, according to [The Washington Post](#), U.N. observers in Syria are providing cover and even targets for the Assad regime. Areas toured by observers were later shelled by security forces, who also carried out sweeps in which civilians suspected of speaking to the observers were taken from their homes and shot or had their houses burned down. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

Just as members of the court held the blasphemer accountable for his actions, the world must similarly point directly at Bashar Assad for his violent brutality against the Syrian people. ■

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