

JULY 30, 2012

Parashat Vaetchanan

Guarding Life

But you shall greatly beware for your souls (Deuteronomy 4:15) (דברים ד:טו) ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם

According to the text, Moses admonished the nation to guard their souls by maintaining a firm allegiance to the laws of the Torah. Yet, Ohr Tzaddikim (see *Mayanah Shel Torah* vol. V p. 30) notes that the verb “and you shall guard” carries an additional connotation as well. “From here, the Torah hints to the *mitzvah* of guarding the body and [maintaining one’s] health...thus, the meaning of the verse is, ‘take great effort to protect the health of your bodies...for the sake of your souls, for sickness of the body also leads to weakness of the soul.’”

Following Moses’ caution to carefully protect the human body, hundreds of Israeli biotech companies have developed revolutionary technologies that have improved and extended human life. Recently, one such company announced exciting progress in the battle against ALS.

The Jewish state has been increasingly successful in developing medical devices and life-saving drugs. Israeli breakthroughs in the life sciences include the world’s best-selling drug for the treatment of multiple sclerosis, Copaxone and Pillcam, the first ingested camera that diagnoses and photographs abnormalities in the gastrointestinal tract. Recently, BrainStorm Cell Therapeutics, an Israeli company based in Jerusalem, announced exciting progress in the battle against amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig’s Disease, a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, [Reuters](#) reported. BrainStorm is developing the drug NurOwn for the treatment of ALS. “On an individual basis we could see improvement in many of the patients involved, each one in different areas,” said Moshe Neuman, CEO of Biomedical Research Design, which serves as a contract research organization for the trial. Some patients reported improved breathing, others increased muscle strength and others enhanced speech. BrainStorm President Chaim Lebovits said the preliminary results demonstrate that the stem cells have the potential not only to stop deterioration but perhaps even cure ALS. “These results also reaffirm our belief that we have an enormous potential of being successful with less severe indications such as multiple sclerosis and Parkinson’s.” For more on Israeli medical advancements, click [here](#).

In keeping with Moses’ directive that we guard our souls by maintaining healthy bodies, companies across Israel like Brainstorm are developing medical technologies that will improve the health of people around the world. ■

A Communal Commandment

Then Moses separated (Deuteronomy 4:41)

אז יבדיל משה (דברים ד:מא)

Moses designated the three cities of refuge located on the east bank of the Jordan River. Rabbeinu Bechaya (on 4:40) notes that Moses recognized that these designations would not go into effect (and protect the accidental killer) until the other three cities were designated following the conquest of the Land, something Moses knew that he himself would not live to see. “Nonetheless, [Moses] wished to make the effort of even half a *mitzvah*...” While he could not complete the *mitzvah* on his own, Moses realized that this fact did not exempt him from doing his part on behalf of the Jewish nation (See *Avot* 2:16).

Moses did his part of the *mitzvah* while counting on others to complete what he could not. We must follow Moses' example and do our individual part to protect the Jewish state, while working with others to further make an impact.

All too often, when confronted with an overwhelming task, we feel that our small contribution would be insignificant and unnoticed. In essence, if we cannot complete the job ourselves, why do it at all? Yet, nothing could be farther from the truth, because the *mitzvah* of Israel advocacy is not an individual task, but a collective one. And as Israel advocates' individual efforts come together, we witness great results. Just recently, President Obama [signed](#) the U.S.-Israel Enhanced Security Cooperation Act into a law. The bill extends the availability of loan guarantees to Israel through fiscal year 2015, expands the war rescue stockpile in Israel and encourages enhanced military and civilian relations. The president said that the bill shows America's "unshakable commitment to Israel." To maintain the strong relationship between the United States and Israel, thousands of advocates must consistently communicate this unshakable commitment. Each individual must act and do their part by participating in local elections, writing letters to members of Congress, calling congressional staffers and becoming personally connected to elected officials. As we can see, each of these small efforts does indeed make a big difference and ultimately secures a strong state of Israel. For more on how you can get involved, click [here](#).

Moses began a *mitzvah* even though he knew that he could not do it alone. We too must do our part to advocate on behalf of Israel. Only when we act collectively can we together fulfill the *mitzvah* of protecting the Jewish state. ■

Distancing from Murder

You shall not commit murder (Deuteronomy 5:16)

לֹא תִרְצַח (דְּבָרִים ה':טז)

The Sages in the Midrash (Mechilta) linked the corresponding commandments in each of the two halves of the Ten Commandments; the first connects to the sixth, the second the seventh, etc. This concept explained that one who violated the sixth commandment by murdering a divinely created soul also inherently rejected the first commandment "I am the Lord your God" (5:6). Moreover, the Sages also warned against any association with a murderer. "Do not associate with murderers. Rather, distance yourself from their gangs so that your children shall not learn the act of killing, for through the sin of murder, destruction comes to the world" (Midrash Aseret Hadibrot).

The Midrash warns against association with those who engage in murder. For this reason, the international community must further isolate the Iranian regime as it supports terrorist groups responsible for murders all over the world.

Following the recent attack on a tour bus carrying Israeli vacationers in Burgas, Bulgaria, intelligence revealed that the bomber was a Hizballah operative, operating with the direct support and encouragement of the Iranian regime, according to [The New York Times](#). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the attack was "part of a global campaign of terror carried out by Iran and Hizballah. This terror campaign has reached a dozen countries on five continents. The world's leading powers should make it clear that Iran is the country that stands behind this terror campaign." However, despite the terrorist attack in Bulgaria, the EU rejects Israeli calls to place Hizballah on its terrorist blacklist. "From our point of view it is unacceptable that Hezbollah terrorists meet and talk with Western diplomats in Beirut on one hand, and they pursue their terrorist activity on European soil on the other hand," Israel Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), Israel has been attempting unsuccessfully since the 1990s to get Hizballah included on the EU terror list. A recent editorial in [The Washington Post](#) said that the international response to Iran's terrorism should be far more vigorous than it has been so far. The bombing in Bulgaria underlines the grim fact that Iran is waging a war of terrorism. Without any consequences from its acts of terrorism, Iran will continue. For more on Hizballah and its relationship with Iran, click [here](#).

The time has come for the international community to heed the concept behind the Sages' admonition and cease associations with murders. The first step is to label any group that instigates deadly acts towards innocent people as a terrorist organization. ■

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.