

AUGUST 27, 2012

Parashat Ki Tetze

It Is Our Problem

You may not hide yourself (Deuteronomy 22:3)

לא תוכל להתעלם (דברים כב:ג)

A section of Ki Tetze (22:1-3) outlines the *mitzvah* of *hashavat aveidah*—returning lost items to their owner. Rabbi Yuval Sherlo (click [here](#) for his article in Hebrew) explains, “This commandment belongs to a unique group of commandments which do not permit us to sit quietly while our fellow man is in trouble. First in this group is the imperative that, ‘You shall not stand idly by the blood of your brother’ (Leviticus 19:16), which requires us to rise up and save someone in mortal danger. We are not permitted to tell ourselves that it’s not our business...rather we are obligated to do everything that we can to save him from danger.”

The broader ethical imperative of the commandment to return lost items encourages us to help those in trouble. As the Syrian regime continues to massacre its own citizens, the international community should not forget this lesson.

Recently in Syria, army shelling and shootings raged across the country. Rebels described a deadly bombardment of mourners in a Damascus suburb during funerals for victims of a massacre, *The New York Times* reported. As the fighting continued, Syria, backed by Russia, rejected warnings by President Barack Obama about possible American military intervention in the 18-month-old conflict if Damascus were to move or deploy unconventional weapons. Obama said the United States regarded the movement or utilization of such weapons to be “a red line.” Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated the Kremlin’s longstanding opposition to foreign intervention and repeated Russia’s desire to help the Syrian government and the rebels reach their own settlement. Moreover, *Voice of America* reported that members of the United Nations mission to Syria were pulling out of the country after their mandate ended in raging conflict. Former U.N.-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan’s six-point peace plan was marred by so much violence that monitors could not effectively do their work safely. According to the article, the observers intended to keep the international community informed of developments on the ground and were not there to broker an end to the conflict. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

Judaism obligates us to take responsibility and action to protect the lives and property of those in danger. As long as the international community refuses to take a stand on the Syrian conflict, the Syrian people will continue to suffer. ■

Slandorous Speech

You shall guard yourself from every evil thing (Deuteronomy 23:10)

ונשמרת מכל דבר רע (דברים כג:י)

The Sages in the Midrash (Midrash Tanchuma, see also Talmud Ketubot 42) explain that “every evil thing” (23:10) is a warning against *lashon hara*—slandorous speech. They added a parable to illustrate the danger and power of hateful speech, comparing the tongue, which is cut off from the rest of the body, to a dangerous dog chained up in a cage within a cage. “When the dog barks, everyone becomes afraid. Were the dog released, imagine the great [damage] it could cause. Similarly, the slanderous tongue lies within the mouth covered by the lips and still causes incalculable damage. Were it outside [the mouth], how much more damage would it cause?”

The Sages added a parable about the fear a barking dog chained up in a cage can evoke to illustrate the danger of hateful speech. Today, the radical Iranian leaders' hateful rhetoric evokes a similar fear in both Israel and the U.S.

Iranian leaders have long utilized the idea of “a cancerous tumor” to describe Israel. They have once again repeated this epithet as they recently spouted hateful rhetoric against the Jewish people and the state of Israel. [Agence France Presse](#) reported, recently Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Israel a “bogus and fake Zionist outgrowth” and Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced “The Zionist regime and the Zionists are a cancerous tumor.” Khamenei delivered a speech saying “the big powers have dominated the destiny of the Islamic countries for years and... installed the Zionist cancerous tumor in the heart of the Islamic world.” In addition, [The Times of Israel](#) reported that in a recent sermon broadcasted on Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV, the deputy speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, top Hamas official Sheik Ahmad Bahr, called for the annihilation of Jews and Americans alike. Bahr told his audience that, “if the enemy sets foot on a single square inch of Islamic land, Jihad becomes an individual duty incumbent upon every Muslim, male or female.” This is “in order to annihilate those Jews.” In another clip Bahr is seen praying, “Oh, Allah, destroy the Jews and their supporters,” and “the Americans and their supporters.” For more anti-Israel vitriol emanating from Iran, click [here](#).

The Sages warn against slanderous speech highlighting the harmful effects that it can have each time frightening words are uttered. In this light, we cannot ignore the hateful speech radical Islamic leaders regularly spout. ■

The Tactics of Amalek

All that were weakened and in your rear (Deuteronomy 25:18) כל הנחשלים אחרריך (דברים כו:יח)

The Torah reserves particular scorn for the nation of Amalek, which attacked the Children of Israel at their weakest point immediately following the Exodus from Egypt. Moses reminds the Israelites how Amalek, “met you on the way, and smote the hindmost of you, all that were weakened and in your rear” (25:18). According to the Midrash, Amalek did not just attack the weakest members of the nation. “Said Rabbi Elazar Hamodai: They entered under the edge of the Clouds [of Glory] and kidnapped souls from Israel and killed them” (Mechilta Beshalach). Rather than fight in battle, Amalek resorted to the tactics of kidnapping and murder.

The Torah's scorn for Amalek stems not just from the timing of their attack, but from their tactics as well. Nowadays, radical groups follow in Amalek's footsteps as they repeatedly attempt to kidnap innocent Israelis.

Israel's general security service, the Shin Bet, recently disclosed the capture of a terrorist cell that was planning to shoot and kidnap Israelis in an attempt to gain the release of Palestinian terrorists currently being held by Israel, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. One purpose of the cell's activities—which began in April and May 2012—and of the planned kidnapping was to try to broker an exchange to free Palestinian prisoners, chiefly Ahmed Sa'adat, the Front for the Liberation of Palestine's (PFLP) secretary-general. Among the members of the four-man cell from the Gaza-based terrorist group, two of the defendants were imprisoned previously for involvement in the PFLP, and one worked as a guard in the Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces who, according to [Israel Hayom](#), planned to utilize weapons he had access to as part of his duties as a guard in the PA security forces, including a M-16 rifle, short Kalashnikov rifle, Jericho pistol, MP5 submachine gun, and Glock pistol. In addition, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is working to confront the threat of Israeli soldier and civilian kidnappings, and recently [updated](#) its captivity training using information from IDF soldier Gilad Shalit who spent five years in Hamas captivity.

The Torah commands us to remember the terrible tactics the nation of Amalek employed as it kidnapped defenseless Jews. Sadly, modern day terrorist groups employ Amalek's tactics by attempting to kidnap innocent Israelis. ■

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