

APRIL 30, 2012

Parashat Achrei Mot-Kedoshim

Danger in Context

After the death of the two sons of Aaron (Leviticus 16:1)

אחרי מות שני בני אהרן (ויקרא טז:א)

Achrei Mot opens with a Divine warning to Moses: “Speak to your brother Aaron that he not come at all times into the holy place that is inside of the Curtain [the Holy of Holies]...so that he not die” (16:2). Moses delivered this warning in the context of an introductory verse, in which “God spoke to Moses after the death of two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died” (16:1). Why was Aaron reminded of the death of his sons as he was given this commandment? According to Rashi (on 16:1), it was in order to emphasize the importance of obeying the order. Nachmanides (on 16:1) adds that the commandment was given when Aaron finished mourning his sons’ deaths, creating a context for Aaron to fully appreciate the consequences of inappropriately entering the Holy of Holies.

This episode reminds us of the importance of understanding contexts and consequences, especially when it comes to matters of life and death. It is for this reason that we must view Iran’s nuclear program within the context of the Islamic Regime’s actions in order to fully appreciate the consequences of a nuclear capable Iran.

Iran, the world’s leading state sponsor of terror, is racing toward a nuclear weapons capability. Through its proxy armies of Hizballah in southern Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, as well as insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Iranian regime supports terrorist attacks against American troops and Israeli civilians. We must keep these facts in mind as we consider what a nuclear capable Iran would like. As Peter Hussey Kirk notes in *The Washington Times*, to understand the threat that Iran poses to the United States one need only take a look at the full context of Iranian foreign policy to see that Iran’s actions are belligerent in nature. “Iran isn’t simply pursuing a defensive strategy. As its meddling in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere makes all too clear, Iran is actively attempting to tilt regional politics in its favor and away from the United States. A nuclear-armed Iran surely would expand those efforts, to our great detriment,” Kirk wrote. “Regime officials have called repeatedly for the annihilation of Israel and for a ‘world without’ the United States.” In this context, the consequences of a nuclear Iran make clear that the Islamic Republic cannot be allowed to develop the most dangerous weapons known to man. For more on how a nuclear Iran would threaten the United States, click [here](#).

The Torah framed the warning to Aaron in the context of the tragic deaths of his sons to teach a lesson. There is a lesson for us today as well. When we understand Iran’s nuclear program in the context of its actions, we appreciate why no options should be taken off the table in confronting the Islamic Regime’s nuclear ambitions. ■

A Sense of Responsibility

And when you reap the harvest of your land (Leviticus 19:9)

ובקצרתם את קציר ארצכם (ויקרא יט:ט)

The language in the text mixes singular and plural verbs as it relays the *mitzvah* of *pe’ah* (the commandment to leave crops in the corner of one’s field for the poor). The verse begins in the plural—*uv’kutzrechem*—“when you (plural) reap,” but then suddenly switches to the singular—*lo techaleh*—“you (singular) shall not wholly reap.” Kli Yakkar (on 19:9) suggests that this odd and sudden change delivers a critical message: “even during times of harvest, when

many are reaping, do not exclude yourself saying that the poor can find sustenance in the fields of others...The obligation is placed on every individual, and one cannot exempt himself..."

Just as every landowner was required to leave a small portion of food in the field for the poor, it is every country's responsibility to do their part to provide food for the world's poorest and most vulnerable populations. Recently, Israel and the United States signed an agreement solidifying their commitment to do just that.

The international development agencies in Israel and America recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to increase cooperation on food aid to Africa, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The MOU between USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development) and Mashav (the Israel Agency for International Development Cooperation) was the first of its kind, according to Mashav head Daniel Carmon: "this MOU is not the start of the relationship; it's the continuing and the strengthening of the relationship." [Ynet](#) reported that, according to Carmon, the future aid package "will include assistance to help food production and crop cycles, as well as address various environmental issues that go beyond the agricultural sector." While the U.S. and Israel have both long provided development assistance in Africa, the MOU allows for closer cooperation on the issue of food security in four countries: Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Rwanda, and also ties Israel more tightly into the issue of fighting for food security and other major issues on the global development agenda. For more on Israel around the world, click [here](#).

The *mitzvah* of *pe'ah* demands that each individual share in the responsibility of providing food for the poor. Israel and the U.S. are both doing their part as they apply this rule not only to people, but also to impoverished countries. ■

Not Standing Idly By

You shall not stand idly by... (Leviticus 19:16)

לֹא תַעֲמֹד... (ויקרא יט:טז)

According to the Torah, we are commanded to not "stand idly by the blood" of our neighbors. In fact, if we have the ability to save a life, we are obligated to intercede. Maimonides (Laws of Murder, chapter 1) writes, "Any person who could have saved someone and did not, violates the prohibition...Furthermore, if one sees his friend drowning in the sea, or that bandits are overtaking him...and he can save him...but does not, he too violates [this commandment]." Thus, we cannot ignore a helpless victim, but rather it is our obligation to rise to the occasion and take action.

In the spirit of the commandment to act whenever possible to save a life, members of Congress have proposed funding that will protect an increasing number of innocent Israeli lives from rocket and mortar attacks.

According to [Globes](#), Hizballah was able to kill one Israeli for every 75 Katyusha rockets fired during the Second Lebanon War. However, "when Iron Dome [the Israeli missile defense system] was deployed...it took an average of 375 rockets to kill one Israeli." Thankfully, the U.S. recognizes the value of this system and the House Armed Services Committee voted to dedicate an additional \$680 million to fund it. As [JTA](#) notes, "In March, U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee ranking member Rep. Howard Berman (D-Calif.) and chairman Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) introduced the Iron Dome Support Act, which authorized the president to provide additional assistance to the missile defense program." This adds to the nearly \$100 million in existing U.S. assistance for medium- and long-range missile defense, in addition to \$3.1 billion dollars in overall security aid to Israel, the [Associated Press](#) reported. This increase for the program was expected as the Pentagon [said](#) that it would work with Congress to steer more funds to the system that has proven effective in intercepting rockets and mortars fired by terrorists from Gaza. For more on U.S.-Israel missile defense cooperation, click [here](#).

Protecting innocent lives is the core value expressed in the commandment that we not "stand idly by" when our fellow man is in danger. The United States continues to uphold this value, stepping in to provide the critical funds needed to save innocent Israeli lives. ■