

APRIL 16, 2012

Parashat Shemini

Playing with Fire

A strange fire (Leviticus 10:1)

אש זרה (ויקרא י:א)

What was it about Nadab and Abihu's "strange fire" sacrifice that was awful enough to warrant their deaths? In his essay "The Natural Order of Miracles" (The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy, 2002), German Jewish philosopher Erich Unger explained that the Tabernacle services followed a precise order because of the awesome power that they controlled. Thus, the brothers were not punished for their unapproved sacrifice; rather it was their divergence from the order that resulted in their deaths. Unger wrote, "Failure to carry out the instructions prescribed results in the instant death of those people whose task and privilege is the service of the Divine manifestation and this is so whether the infringement was accidental or deliberate...The Divine power responds with the instant death of those involved and does so with the inevitability of the laws of nature; there is no time, no weighing up of the intent of those involved, of their past merits, personal value..."

From Unger we understand that Nadab and Abihu's deaths were not a punishment for their behavior, but rather the natural result of their deviation from the rules. If Iran continues to deviate from the rules that bind it to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), we can expect to see similar disastrous results for Israel, the U.S. and the world.

According to Thomas Graham Jr. of the [Arms Control Association](#), "The NPT is often seen to be based on a central bargain: 'the NPT non-nuclear-weapon states agree never to acquire nuclear weapons and the NPT nuclear-weapon states in exchange agree to share the benefits of peaceful nuclear technology...'" Yet, for more than 25 years, Iran—a signatory of the NPT—has pursued a path to nuclear weapons. Even Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability, without an actual device, would be enough to spur a regional nuclear arms race. In fact, former Saudi Arabian intelligence chief Prince Turki al-Faisal has already [said](#) that if international efforts fail, "we [Saudi Arabia] must, as a duty to our country and people, look into all options we are given, including obtaining these weapons ourselves." The proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East would likely spread elsewhere, marking the death knell of the global non-proliferation regime. Precisely because the stakes are so high, the U.S. must make clear that all options remain on the table to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. For more on how a nuclear Iran would threaten U.S. national security, click [here](#).

Nadab and Abihu's tragic deaths highlight the dangers of straying from the rules. We must all work to make sure that our elected representatives understand this lesson, and hold Iran to the rules of the NPT—or be prepared to face a much more dangerous tomorrow. ■

The Deadly Fire (Yom HaShoah)

And there came forth a fire (Leviticus 10:2)

ותצא אש (ויקרא י:ב)

The Torah describes many details that give us insight into the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. For instance the Midrash, in Yalkut Teimani, uses the text to explain that the fire that consumed the brothers was actually the Angel of Death. Perhaps more revealing, the phrase, "there came forth fire from before the Lord" (10:2), teaches us that "their deaths

were a source of pain to the Almighty, for the sons of Aaron were beloved...and completely righteous” (see Torah Sheleimah on Shemini, Chapter 10 footnote 17).

The tragic tale of the fire that took the lives of the virtuous Nadab and Abihu takes on special meaning as we consider the literal meaning of the word Holocaust: sacrifice by fire. While we must never forget the brutality that destroyed European Jewry, we must also adjust to a future where eyewitnesses are becoming increasingly scarce.

April 19 marks this year’s Holocaust Remembrance Day, known as “Yom HaShoah” in Israel. The Holocaust, the state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime, represents the most devastating annihilation attempt of a single race of people in history. With each passing year, the number of survivors who witnessed the horrors of the Nazis first-hand diminishes, leaving a new generation to ensure that this terrible period is never forgotten. This presents a special challenge to our community. As Dr. Jonathan Sarna told the [Algemeiner Journal](#), “We do not want to teach young Jews that the only reason to be Jewish is because people want to kill and destroy Jews...Nevertheless I think it would be disastrous for humanity if we allowed the memory of the Shoah to dissipate; our job is to keep the memory fresh and to ensure that these lessons are learned anew in every generation.” As our children, and our children’s children, study the stories of the Holocaust, they will learn lessons of courage and resistance, see the strength of the human spirit, and understand the importance of a Jewish state. For more on the Holocaust, click [here](#).

The deadly fire that destroyed Aaron’s sons reminds us of the devastating sacrifice by fire which destroyed so many of our ancestors. We must remember these deaths even as we search for ways to strengthen the Jewish future. ■

Acts of Kindness for All

And the stork (Leviticus 11:19)

ואת החסידה (ויקרא יא:יט)

Rashi (on 11:19) notes that the stork is called the *chasidah* (from the Hebrew word *chesed*, or kindness) because, “It provides means of sustenance for its friends.” However, despite the bird’s unique quality of kindness, it is found on the list of impure, non-kosher birds. Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter, author of the Chiddushei Harim (See Ma’ayanah Shel Torah vol. 3 p. 61), explained that the *chasidah* is not kosher because it only helps its friends. Because those who are not counted among its friends cannot benefit from its largesse, the bird does not merit to be categorized as kosher.

The non-kosher status of the stork signifies the importance of providing sustenance for both friend and foe alike. Clearly Israel understands this message as it provides humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza, even though they elected a terrorists organization dedicated to the destruction of the Jewish state as their leaders.

The Hamas regime controlling the Gaza Strip rejects Israel’s right to exist and believes that the complete annihilation of the Jewish state is the only resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hamas actively seeks Israel’s destruction and smuggles Iranian weapons and rockets through tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border. Yet, Israel continues to facilitate the transfer of necessary supplies for the Palestinian population in Gaza. Even when terrorists in the coastal strip recently fired over 300 rockets at civilian centers in Israel, the Jewish state continued to transfer humanitarian aid to Gaza’s civilians. According to the [IDF](#), in the first week of April alone there were approximately 27,000 tons of goods brought from Israel to the Gaza Strip through land crossings, 300 medical patients crossed from the Gaza Strip into Israel and the West Bank, and 150 international organization staff members were allowed in to the Gaza Strip. Moreover, Israel “coordinated the export of 1.4 tons of produce from the Gaza Strip to European markets [in the first quarter of 2012]—more than was exported all of last year (2011).” [Yediot Achronot](#) reported that Israel also agreed to transfer electrical transformers to increase power production in Gaza.

The stork’s presence on the “not kosher” list highlights the importance of helping everyone. By providing assistance to the people of Gaza, the state of Israel upholds the principle of performing *chesed* unconditionally. ■

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