



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 26, 2012

Parashat Tzav – Shabbat Hagadol

The Ultimate Price

And the priest shall put on his linen garment (Leviticus 6:3)

ולבש הכהן מזדו בד (ויקרא ו:ג)

Ohr Hachayim (on verse 6:3) views the details surrounding the burnt offering, including the description of the clothes that the High Priest wore, as an allegory for the devastating Jewish suffering throughout the long millennia of exile. His play on the words “*michnesei bod*,” literally meaning “garment of linen,” alludes to Jewish deaths that unified Israel and brought about faith in God. According to his mystical interpretation, the text suggests that “nations have killed those who instill faith in and love for God and in the heart of Israel.” Stating that nothing should ever come between us as Jews and the innocent who have been oppressed for their faith for centuries, he notes that the priest wears the garment directly on his skin to symbolize this closeness and the fact that “These are the beloved of the Exalted God, where nothing separates between them...”

The powerful allegory that links the burnt offering and Jewish suffering calls to mind the persecution that our people have faced throughout the generations. Sadly, as the recent murders in France remind us, we have not yet reached a point in human history where being Jewish does not make one more likely to be attacked.

The world continues to grieve for the victims of the barbaric killings of a Jewish teacher and three children in front of the Otzar Hatorah school in Toulouse, France. By now [the details of the shooting](#) have been seared into our memory: The shooter, 24-year old Mohammad Merah, opened fire at the entrance to the school building, killing Jonathan Sandler and his two children—Aryeh, aged six, and Gavriel, aged three—as well as Miriam Monsonego, aged eight. Following a desperate manhunt, police surrounded Merah’s apartment. According to [Agence France Presse](#), “Merah reportedly told negotiators at his flat that the Jewish school attack was to avenge Palestinian children killed by Israel...” [Haaretz](#) further reported that Merah was previously “jailed for bombings in Afghanistan in 2007, but escaped months later in a mass prison break organized by Taliban insurgents.” Accompanying the bodies of the Otzar Hatorah massacre to their final resting place in Israel, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe [said](#) that “France is determined to fight terrorism using all of its resources and I would like to express solidarity with Israel which has dealt with, is dealing with and will probably continue to deal with the horrors of terrorism.”

Ohr Hachayim’s suggestion that the linen garment is symbolic of the innocent who have been killed for their faith is an apt description of the Jewish victims in Toulouse. We must all be vigilant, and work to reach the day when no one is forced to suffer for simply being Jewish. ■

Intentions and Actions

In the place where the burnt-offering is killed (Leviticus 6:18) במקום אשר תשחט את העולה (ויקרא ו:יח)

The Torah specifies that “in the place where the burnt offering is killed shall the sin offering be killed before the Lord” (6:18). Why were the burnt offering and sin offering slaughtered in the same place? The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 7:3) draws a cause-and-effect relationship between the two sacrifices, noting that “the burnt offering is only brought due to sinful thoughts,” and the sin offering was brought following sinful behavior. Rabbi Israel Salanter (see

Meiotzareinu Hayashan vol. 2, p. 259) elaborated: “when a person is consumed with sinful thoughts, at the end of the day this leads him to commit the sin itself.”

In drawing a connection between the burnt offering and the sin offering, the Torah teaches us that the intention to sin leads to sin itself. For this reason, we must take Iran seriously when it claims that it seeks to “wipe Israel off the map.”

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has articulated hateful sentiments against Israel, including [saying](#) that “Like a cancer cell that spreads through the body, this regime [Israel] infects any region. It must be removed from the body.” This statement echoes other similar calls by the Iranian president to destroy Israel. While such statements express Tehran’s intent clearly, what is truly frightening is Iran’s determination to stonewall international inspectors while seeking to build the weapons to realize Ahmadinejad’s threats. In fact, Iran’s recent signal that it was unwilling to grant a request by international nuclear inspectors for unfettered access to a military complex only strengthened suspicions that the site may house a chamber designed to test explosives used in atomic weapons triggers, [The New York Times](#) reported. When the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency expressed irritation about Iran’s lack of cooperation, Iran denied suggestions that it had sought to cleanse the Parchin military complex to eliminate any trace of incriminating activity. The dangerous rhetoric and ongoing efforts to develop a nuclear weapon must spur the international community to view Iran as the single greatest threat to international peace, and to use every tool to convince Iran to end its pursuit of nuclear weapons. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The antagonistic words and actions emanating from the Iranian government make clear that the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism cannot be allowed to attain the most deadly weapons known to man. We must remember that just as the burnt offering brought about the sin offering, destructive intentions lead to destructive actions. ■

The Great Shabbat Uprising (Shabbat Hagadol)

It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover (Exodus 12:27)

זבח פסח הוא לה' (שמות יב:כז)

Ba’alei Tosfot (on Talmud Shabbat 87b) offers an interesting explanation as to why the Shabbat before Passover is called the “Great Shabbat.” He states that on the Shabbat before the original Passover in ancient Egypt, the Jewish people were instructed to designate a lamb—an Egyptian deity—as the future Passover sacrifice. When the Egyptians’ firstborn inquired about this behavior, the Jews explained the upcoming Plague of the Firstborn. Then, “The [Egyptian firstborn] approached Pharaoh and their elders to request that they free the Jews, but Pharaoh and his ministers would not comply. The firstborn waged war against Egypt...” Therefore, this Shabbat is called the “Great Shabbat” because it recalls the miracle of Egypt’s firstborn rising up against the inequities of their own government.

The “Great Shabbat” reminds us of an ancient story of citizens revolting against the immoral actions of their government. We see a similar story unfolding before us in modern Syria.

Syria’s diplomatic isolation in the Arab world recently deepened as four more Persian Gulf states closed their embassies in Damascus while government forces pressed offensives in the north of the country and around the capital, [The New York Times](#) reported. The four countries—Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates—joined Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in announcing the closure of their embassies. The United States, among several other western countries, has already closed its embassy in Damascus as part of its effort to press Syrian President Bashar al Assad to step aside. [CNN](#) reported that following the one-year anniversary of the popular uprising in Syria against Assad, in which at least 8,000 people have been killed, the United Nations Security Council “issued a presidential statement endorsing the peace mission of diplomat Kofi Annan, the U.N.-Arab League joint special envoy to Syria,” whose mission is “to stop the violence, gain ‘timely’ humanitarian aid access and foster a Syrian-led political transition.” For more on Syria, click [here](#).

As the “Great Shabbat” marks the popular uprising of the ancient Egyptians, let us take a moment to pray for the Syrian rebels fighting for the future of their country. May they soon know the peace of a free and open society. ■

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