

MARCH 12, 2012

Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei / Parah

A Spirit of Generosity

And Moses gathered (Exodus 35:1)

ויקהל משה (שמות לה:א)

Moses gathered all of the Israelites together to hear the commandment that asked people of generous spirit to donate gold, silver and other valuables towards the building of the Tabernacle. He called together the entire congregation but he was not asking everyone to contribute, only those “of a willing heart” (35:5). While donations were voluntary, Moses gathered every member of the community to emphasize that the monetary value of a gift was not as important as the Jewish people’s presence and sincere desire to give. According to Pisikta Zutrata (Shemot 35:5) the merit of generosity raises our nation to a spiritually high level. Thus, Moses revealed that giving is not an obligation but rather something that is done because of a person’s spirit of generosity.

Moses gathered all of the people together to instill the value of generosity within the nation as a whole. In modern times, Israel consistently looks to help those in need all over the world, demonstrating her desire to lend a helping hand whenever possible.

From being the first nation to organize a field hospital in Haiti after its devastating earthquake to building shelters for African refugees, the state of Israel stands ready to help those in need. In fact, Israel recently sent “humanitarian aid to the Republic of Congo where 200 people were killed...in an explosion at an ammunition depot in the capital city of Brazzaville,” [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The country’s sense of *gemillut chasadim* (acts of kindness) is not only given to Israel’s friends. Israel proffered [assistance to Iran](#) after a devastating earthquake ravaged the Islamic Republic several years ago, and as [Agence France Presse](#) reported, Israel has offered to send humanitarian aid to Syria through the International Committee of the Red Cross. “The Jewish state cannot stand by without doing a thing while atrocities are taking place in a neighboring country and people are losing their whole worlds,” Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said. “It is our moral duty to at least offer humanitarian help and arouse the world to act to end the massacre.” For more on how Israel helps other countries, click [here](#).

Since our birth as a nation at Sinai, sincere generosity has been embedded in the Jewish people’s values as a core component of our national identity. Israel continues to manifest this inherent national trait as the spirit of generosity has become a hallmark of the Jewish state. ■

The Gift that Gives

Take from among you an offering (Exodus 35:5)

קחו מאתכם תרומה (שמות לה:ה)

In describing the solicitation of materials for the construction of the Tabernacle, the Torah tells us that the Jewish nation was commanded to “Take from among you an offering to God” (35:5). Many commentators wonder why the Israelites were commanded to “take” an offering instead of “give” an offering. The Midrash (Midrash Agadah) explains that while the people were indeed giving, Moses told them that they would also “Take a merit for yourselves; Take a blessing for the people of your household” by their charitable acts. As such, the Torah uses the word “take” because when giving generously to construct the Tabernacle, the Israelites’ gifts would also give back many-fold.

Like the gifts for the Tabernacle that brought blessings upon the nation of Israel, America's aid to the state of Israel brings great benefits not only to the Jewish state, but to American interests as well.

U.S. security assistance for Israel in the annual foreign aid bill is the most tangible manifestation of American support for Israel, especially during a time of tremendous turmoil in the Middle East. American aid is a vital component of U.S. commitments to ensure that the Jewish state maintains its qualitative military edge over its adversaries. This year, President Obama has requested \$3.1 billion in security assistance for Israel as part of his budget for fiscal year 2013, aid that represents the fifth year of a 10-year agreement to provide the Jewish state with the resources to defend itself amid rising threats in the region. As this aid does immeasurable good for Israel, it also benefits the United States. By helping Israel defend itself, America promotes its own interests at home and overseas. U.S. aid has helped to deter major conflict by making clear to potential foes that they cannot defeat Israel on the battlefield. Moreover, Israeli military innovations help save the lives of American troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. Because the United States has a deep strategic relationship with Israel, the U.S. military is able to learn from the Israel Defense Forces' vast combat experience. In addition, Israel spends 75 percent of U.S. aid in the United States purchasing U.S. military equipment, and Israeli aid dollars create American jobs. For more on Israel and the U.S., click [here](#).

While America clearly faces a tough budgetary environment, our aid to Israel is a cost-effective way to serve critical American interests. Like the gifts that the Jewish people gave to the Tabernacle, which benefited the donors in return, U.S. aid to Israel offers tremendous return on the America's investment. ■

The Danger of Delay (Parashat Parah)

A red heifer (Numbers 19:2)

פרה אדומה (במדבר יט:ב)

On the Shabbat immediately following Purim we add the additional reading of Parashat Parah, which outlines the sprinkling of the red heifer's ashes on the ritually impure to return them to purity. Why do we read this section three weeks before Passover? Eliyahu Kitov, in his [Book of the Heritage](#) (p. 292), writes that the "Reading [of] this passage before [the month of] Nisan is to remind all who had been defiled...to purify themselves in order to be able to offer the Pesach sacrifice in its proper time. The reading was set sufficiently before Passover to hurry an impure person to act...While he is still in his home and community, we remind him that if he had become ritually defiled he must first purify himself...and then he would be able to offer the Passover sacrifice..."

We read Parashat Parah well before Passover to give abundant warning to the ritually impure to prepare for the coming holiday. Today, this lesson resonates as the value of being properly prepared is saving lives in southern Israel.

After receiving intelligence of an impending terror attack against Israeli civilians, the Israeli Air Force struck a vehicle carrying the leader of the Popular Resistance Committee—the same group whose leaders were behind the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Since the Israeli defensive action on Friday, March 9th, more than 140 rockets have been fired at civilian targets in southern Israel. Israel has taken steps over the years to prepare for rocket attacks, and moved more than one million civilians into bomb shelters and closed schools for at least 200,000 students in order to keep civilians safe. The tragedy of this scenario was succinctly summed up in a [tweet](#) on March 10th from CUFI, Christians United for Israel: "In the U.S. we have snow days - in Israel they have rocket days. Tomorrow 200,000 children in southern Israel will stay home from school." Meanwhile, the true power of Israel's preparations was on display in the performance of Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system. As of Sunday, March 11th the "Iron Dome system has intercepted 40 rockets since Friday," [Haaretz](#) reported, noting that "Security officials said the Iron Dome systems performed extraordinarily." As of this writing, "The Israel Air Force's Iron Dome rocket-defense system [has increased]... the interception rate from 75 percent last year to over 90%," according to [The Jerusalem Post](#). For the latest news and information on the situation in southern Israel, visit www.aipac.org.

The reading of Parashat Parah provided ample warning before Passover to avoid the pitfalls of delay. Thankfully, the steps that Israel has taken to prevent rockets from killing innocent civilians is having a similar effect. ■

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