



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 19, 2012

Parashat Vayikra

Welcoming All Worshippers

When any man of you brings an offering (Leviticus 1:2)

אדם כי יקריב מכם (ויקרא א:ב)

Why does the Torah use the unusual “any man,” a term almost never used in the text, to describe who could offer a sacrifice in the Temple? According to the Jerusalem Talmud (Shekalim 1:4), this all-encompassing language is used to refer to both Jew and gentile alike. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (on 1:2) adds that through this phrase, “an inscription is made which opens the Temple to all men—not exclusively to Jews. Every human being can bring his offering...The very first word of the Mosaic laws of the Temple gives the Temple the most universal mission.”

The fact that both Jew and gentile were welcomed to worship in the Temple gives us insight into the free nature of ancient Jewish society. The legacy of this openness is felt in modern Israel, a country that—by law and by deed—protects and defends the rights of all faiths.

Israel’s Declaration of Independence explicitly guarantees the rights of religious minorities and Israel’s Knesset has reaffirmed these rights by statute. Each faith has its own religious council and courts, recognized by law, with jurisdiction over all religious affairs and matters of personal status. Elsewhere in the Middle East, minority religious groups regularly suffer from persecution and discrimination. Sadly, as Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren noted in *The Wall Street Journal*, this trend has led to a mass exodus of Christians from both Gaza and the West Bank as they suffer persecution. Yet, “In contrast to elsewhere in the Middle East where hatred of Christians is ignored or encouraged, Israel remains committed to its Declaration of Independence pledge to ‘ensure the complete equality of all its citizens irrespective of religion.’ It guarantees free access to all Christian holy places, which are under the exclusive aegis of Christian clergy. ... Israel, in spite of its need to safeguard its borders from terrorists, allows holiday access to Jerusalem’s churches to Christians from both the West Bank and Gaza.”

People from around the world were welcomed to worship together with the Israelites in the Temple. The Jewish state continues to uphold that sense of openness by protecting and maintaining the religious freedoms of all faiths. ■

Avoiding Aggression

An offering to God (Leviticus 1:2)

קרבן לה' (ויקרא א:ב)

The Midrash notes that only domesticated animals were permitted to be offered as sacrifices. “Said God: the ox is pursued by the lion; the goat [is pursued] by the leopard...offer before me from the pursued, and not from the pursuers” (Vayikra Rabbah 27:5). The Talmud (Baba Kamma 93a) draws a direct message from this same idea: “Said Rabbi Abahu: A man should always be from the pursued, and not from the pursuers. For, there are no more hunted birds than the pigeons and doves, and scriptures permitted these species [to be offered] on the altar [in the Temple].” Thus, we learn to refrain from hunting and to avoid attacking others whenever possible (for more detail, see Shivim Panim L’Torah by Rabbi Simcha Raz vol. 3 pp. 13-14).

The Talmudic warning against predatory behavior applies to us as individuals, and as a Jewish nation as well. Perhaps

for this very reason Israel has been working with the United States to develop the tools to avoid military operations and save lives.

Typically, in the face of rocket barrages against a civilian population, countries have no choice but to act militarily to protect their citizens. However Israel, recently facing the worst barrage of rockets from Palestinian militants since 2009, was able to protect its citizens not through violence, but through a new interceptor system that destroys missiles in midair before they fall on population centers. The Iron Dome missile defense system has had a 90 percent success rate in three rounds of hostilities according to Israeli officials, who noted that “[investment in Iron Dome is investment in peace](#).” Iron Dome is just one part of a multilayered defense shield that Israel is assembling to protect itself, with crucial funding provided by the United States. While the system guards against short-range rockets, a system known as David’s Sling or the Magic Wand is being developed to take down missiles with a medium range of 25-185 miles. Meanwhile, the Arrow, which was jointly developed by the U.S. and Israel, was created with long-range, high-velocity missiles in mind. For more on U.S.-Israel defense and homeland security cooperation, click [here](#).

The importance of refraining from rapacious behavior was emphasized in the choice of animals that were permitted to be sacrificed in the Temple. This ethic continues to influence the leaders of Israel, a country that would rather use its limited resources to protect civilians than engage in military operations. ■

Failure of Leadership

And if the whole congregation of Israel shall err (Leviticus 4:13) (ויקרא ד:יג) ואם כל עדת ישראל ישגו

According to Rashi (on 4:13), the scenario in which the “whole congregation of Israel shall err” actually refers to an incorrect ruling of the Sanhedrin that would lead to widespread, albeit unwilling, sin by the Israelites. In order to atone, the court was required to bring an offering that would compensate for the entire group. How would this sacrifice atone for a faulty ruling? Sefer Hachinuch (commandment 118) explains that “the sacrifices were intended to subdue the spirit of yearning and desire, and strengthen the spirit of the intellect.” Put simply, an incorrect ruling was the result of the Sanhedrin allowing the yearning and desire of their emotions to cloud their judgment. Thus, the Sanhedrin’s sacrifice atoned for the entire groups’ mistake because in taking responsibility for their base actions, they demonstrated the integrity of leadership.

Like the mistaken ruling of the Sanhedrin, which emerged from a lack of intellectual integrity, two recent United Nations actions demonstrate that the intellectual integrity of the world body is dubious at best.

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) recently wrapped up its annual session by passing a resolution condemning Israel. In fact, the only country-specific resolution by the commission, whose members include both Libya and Iran, ignored the vital role that women play in Israeli society and singled out Israel as “the major obstacle for Palestinian women with regard to their advancement, self-reliance and integration in the development of their society,” [Haaretz](#) reported. In addition, [Reuters](#) reported that while the U.N. cultural agency UNESCO did condemn Syria for its indiscriminate violence against civilians, it did not expel Syria from its human rights committee. Angered by Syria’s inclusion on the committee, a group of Western and Arab nations had pressed for Syria’s expulsion following the violence in the country. But, a resolution which condemned Damascus for “the continued widespread and systematic violation of human rights,” stopped short of expelling Damascus from the key committee. Ambassador David Killion, U.S. Permanent Representative to UNESCO, [said](#) that “The United States is profoundly disappointed that this resolution does not call for the outright removal of Syria from the Committee on Conventions and Recommendations...”

The offering of the Sanhedrin for a mistaken ruling was intended to remind the Jewish law makers to lead the people with honorable decisions. Unfortunately, there is no sacrifice today that leaders of the U.N. could bring to atone for lack of intellectual integrity demonstrated in their recent pronouncements. ■

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