

FEBRUARY 4, 2013

## Parashat Mishpatim

### A Destructive Fire

If a fire breaks out (Exodus 22:5)

כי תצא אש (שמות כב:ה)

The Talmud (Baba Kama 60a) notes the progression of the fire in the verse, which begins in the thorns and ultimately consumes the useful produce, and derives an important lesson. “Said Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeini: Destruction only comes to the world when the wicked are in the world, and it always begins with the righteous, as it is written, “If fire breaks out, and catches in thorns [i.e. the wicked].” The fire spreads when there are thorns and the fire first consumes the righteous, as it is written, “so that the shocks of corn [i.e. the righteous]...are consumed...”

True to the words of the Talmud, too often throughout history the righteous have suffered from the fire spread by destructive groups. Today, the world faces the prospect of a lethal, deadly fire in the hands of a dangerous regime.

Recently, the FBI concluded that Iran provided training and support for the 1996 attack during which a truck bomb destroyed the Khobar Towers housing complex in Saudi Arabia, killing 19 American servicemen, [Reuters](#) reported. The decision served as yet another reminder of Iran’s continuing role as the world’s leading state sponsor of terror. Through its proxy armies of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the Iranian regime supports terrorists that have carried out attacks on American troops and Israeli civilians. A completed Iranian nuclear weapons program would represent an existential threat to Israel, as it would arm the world’s leading sponsor of terrorism with the ultimate weapon. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), a former representative of the Iranian Foreign Ministry recently told Israel’s Channel 2 that if Iran succeeded in building a nuclear bomb, “it would definitely use it against Israel or against any other enemy state.” He also warned that if Iran is allowed to stall for more time, “it will have the knowledge to make a nuclear bomb in less than a year.” For more on Iran, visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).

According to the Talmud, calamity begins when the world allows the wicked to kindle fires of destruction. We must act to ensure Iran cannot acquire the type of fire that would enable it to bring destruction upon the righteous. ■

### Losing Control

He that kindled the fire shall surely pay (Exodus 22:5)

שלם ישלם המבעיר את הבערה (שמות כב:ה)

Fire has a mind of its own. It spreads without the input or assistance of the person who lit it. Why then is the person who kindled the fire obligated to pay for damages? Rashi (on 22:5) explains that, “even though he lit the first in his own property and it went out on its own by way of the thorns that it found, he is obligated to pay, for he did not guard his ember [and ensure] that it did not go out and cause damage.” Without the proper precautions and safeguards, dangerous elements can easily spread and cause devastating damage.

Just as a fire has the power to cause terrible destruction if left unguarded, as the Assad regime loses control over Syria, its stockpile of chemical weapons presents a serious threat if it falls into the hands of terrorist groups.

As the Assad regime unravels, the danger of Syria’s stockpile of chemical weapons falling into the hands of radical groups like and Hezbollah continues to grow. Recently, the U.S. government [asked](#) Jordan and Turkey to take action

in the event that Syria uses chemical weapons. The exact nature of the action expected from the two nations, which could include the destruction or takeover of the Assad regime's chemical weapons facilities, is not yet known. In Israel, "officials reported a significant increase in demand for gas masks and other protective gear...as fears of Syrian chemical weapons being turned against Israel ramped up," [The Times of Israel](#) reported. Almost three times the average number of citizens came to distribution centers across the country to receive gas masks. Israel has repeatedly warned against the transfer of chemical weapons to non-state actors, especially Hezbollah. Israeli Vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom said that such a transfer of arms "would be crossing a line that would demand a different approach." According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), Israel recently launched a rare airstrike inside Syria targeting a convoy believed to contain surface-to-air weapons bound for Hezbollah. Reports indicate that the airstrike targeted Russian-made SA-17 surface-to-air missiles that could be used by Hezbollah to hit Israeli jets, drones and helicopters. Israel recently deployed two Iron Dome batteries in the north, at least one of them near Haifa, amid growing fears that Syrian chemical weapons may be turned against the Jewish state. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

Like a dangerous fire which can cause untold damage if left unchecked, in the hands of terrorist groups like Hezbollah, Syrian chemical weapons would present a grave threat to the safety of Israel's population. ■

## Perverting Justice

**Keep far from a false matter (Exodus 23:7)**

**מדבר שקר תרחק (שמות כג:ז)**

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Immediately after the probation against judicial bias—"You shall not wrest the judgment of your poor in his cause" 23:6), the Torah adds that we must, "keep far from a false matter" (23:7). Ibn Ezra explains that the latter verse, rather than addressing the people as a whole, also focuses specifically on the judge instructing, "that he not issue a false judgment." According to Ibn Ezra, the two verses are inherently connected: bias in judgment ultimately leads to faulty verdicts and the perversion of justice.

The U.N. has repeatedly demonstrated the inherent connection described by Ibn Ezra between bias in judgment and false verdicts, leaving Israel no choice but to avoid being judged by the U.N.'s Human Rights Council (UNHRC).

The United Nations has consistently employed a double standard in its treatment of Israel, directing false allegations against the country while ignoring acts of genocide and other massive human rights violations committed by other countries. For this reason, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported, Israel cut its ties with the UNHRC last March to protest its establishment of a fact-finding mission on West Bank settlements. "That was the last straw after we had to endure systematic abuse and marginalization for years," Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor told [The Washington Post](#). "They have held more meetings and taken more decisions on Israel than on all the other countries put together. Israel, and only Israel, is a permanent agenda item." The longstanding bias against Israel in the UNHRC manifests itself in numerous ways. The seventh agenda item is always dedicated to Israeli violations of human rights in the Palestinian territories. Similarly, although there are eight countries with special rapporteurs assigned to investigate their human rights abuses, the investigator for the abuses in the Palestinian territories is the only one that is permanently assigned. As of 2011, the council issued 51 condemnations against countries, of which 35 were against Israel. Despite Israel's boycott of the UNHRC, it gives the United States full access each year to conduct its own international human rights report and participates in this process, knowing that the U.S. report will offer some criticisms. Israel's Foreign Ministry [warned](#) that "the only way to resolve all pending issues between Israel and the Palestinians, including the settlements issue, is through direct negotiations without pre-conditions." The Ministry added that the "The Human Rights Council has sadly distinguished itself by its systematical, one-sided and biased approach towards Israel." For more on the Israel and the United Nations, click [here](#).

As Ibn Ezra explains, an objective verdict can only be established if the process is also unbiased. The inherent anti-Israel bias at the United Nations has brought unjust international criticism upon the Jewish state and this has forced Israel to cut its ties with the body entirely. ■