

APRIL 15, 2013

Parashat Achrei Mot-Kedoshim

A Tangible Warning

After the death of the two sons of Aaron (Leviticus 16:1)

אחרי מות שני בני אהרן (ויקרא טז:א)

Why does the text note that Moses was given the laws of the Yom Kippur service of the priests specifically “after the deaths of the two sons of Aaron” (16:1)? The Midrash (Torat Kohanim), quoted by Rashi, offers a parable: “Said Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria: [This is comparable] to a patient who, after being examined by the doctor is told, ‘Do not drink in damp places nor sleep in dry places.’ [This is less effective than] the doctor who instead says, ‘Do not drink in damp places nor sleep in dry places so that you do not die, just as Ploni did!’”

Moses mentioned the deaths of Nadab and Abihu to tangibly warn Aaron about the dangers of inattentiveness while performing the service of the Tabernacle. This year, Holocaust Remembrance Day not only memorialized the victims of Nazi atrocities, it also served as a tangible warning to the world about what can happen if we do not take threatening rhetoric seriously.

During the recent Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Yad Vashem Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu [spoke](#) about how the hatred against the Jews that existed during the Holocaust endures today. Netanyahu quoted Iranian religious leaders as recently saying, “the Zionists are microbes and bacteria, the Jews are polluted people that spread disease.” Netanyahu stated that anti-Semitic hatred “has not disappeared, it has been switched with murderous hatred against the state of the Jews.” President Shimon Peres also [addressed](#) the ceremony saying that the world must ask itself how a regime such as that in Iran can deny the Holocaust and threaten a new Holocaust so soon after six million people lost their lives. “The Holocaust will not be lost in the depths of history,” Peres told the crowd gathered at Yad Vashem, “it is right here with us, burning and tangible.” At the same time Iran’s leaders explicitly threaten Israel’s right to exist by spewing vitriolic rhetoric the country continues to accelerate their pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability. For more of Iran’s hateful rhetoric, click [here](#).

Just as Moses used the deaths of Aaron’s sons as an example of the dangers that the priests faced, Israeli leaders emphasized the dangers of anti-Semitic language from a regime that is working to build genocidal weapons. ■

Keeping their Word

And you shall not swear by My name falsely (Leviticus 19:12)

ולא תשבועו בשמי לשקר (ויקרא יט:יב)

Sefer Hachinuch (Commandment 227) notes that the prohibition against swearing falsely precludes both positive and negative oaths. Jewish law prohibits swearing falsely whether our oath refers to past events or future commitments. Explaining the meaning behind the prohibition, the Chinuch writes, “One who swears to do something and does not do it, he is among those who rebel against the light and deny truth...for one who commits to fulfill his sworn oath [declares that] he will never deviate [from his word], just as the Holy One exists and will never change.” This commandment to keep our word appears in other forms in the Torah as well, as we are instructed not to “break our word” (Numbers 30:3) as well as to “keep far from a false matter” (Exodus 23:7).

The Torah repeatedly refers to keeping our word to highlight the importance of upholding a verbal commitment. Recently, the United States reminded Turkey to fulfill its verbal commitment to renew ties with Israel.

In March, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu phoned Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to offer Israel's apology to Turkey "for a deadly raid on a Gaza aid flotilla." Netanyahu also "announced a full resumption of diplomatic ties as well as compensation," [AFP](#) reported. The call was engineered by President Barack Obama at the tail end of his visit to Israel. An official in Netanyahu's office said the two leaders spoke and "agreed to normalization between the countries including returning ambassadors, and cancelling legal proceedings against IDF soldiers." Yet, in the weeks that have followed, Turkey has failed to make good on its promises to renormalize relations with Israel or [cancel legal proceedings](#) against IDF soldiers. For this reason, during his recent visit to Turkey, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, "encourage[d] Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey to move ahead with his commitment to normalize relations with Israel," [The New York Times](#) reported. "But no sooner was the new agreement announced than Mr. Erodogan boasted that it underscored Turkey's regional clout, and concerns emerged that there could be problems fulfilling the agreement...A State Department official said Mr. Kerry planned to 'encourage Turkey to expeditiously implement its agreement with Israel and fully normalize their relationship,'" which includes the exchange of Turkish and Israeli ambassadors.

The prohibition against swearing falsely reminds us to keep our word and adhere to our commitments. Turkey should follow this traditional legal principle, and fulfill its commitment to renew ties with the Jewish state. ■

We Must Speak Out

You shall surely rebuke your neighbor (Leviticus 19:17)

הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת עַמִּיתְךָ (וַיִּקְרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל)

The Torah teaches us, "You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him" (19:17). Nahmanides, explaining the connection between rebuke and the bearing of sin, notes that one who had the opportunity to offer words of rebuke and fails to do so bears responsibility for the sin itself, "For you will be guilty should he sin and you did not rebuke him." The Talmud (Shabbat 54) notes that this rule applies not only on an individual level, but also on a global level as well. "Any person who has the ability to issue protest...about [a matter related to] the entire world, is held responsible for the [effects of that matter on the] entire world."

The Talmud reminds us that if we don't speak out against wrongdoing, we bear responsibility for the resulting harm. For this reason, we must continue to speak out, and demand that European states label Hezbollah as a terrorist group.

As President Barack Obama [spoke](#) to thousands of Israelis in Jerusalem this past March, he reminded everyone of the "five Israelis who boarded a bus in Bulgaria, who were blown up because of where they came from; who were robbed of the ability to live, and love, and raise families." The President continued, "That's why every country that values justice should call Hezbollah what it truly is—a terrorist organization. Because the world cannot tolerate an organization that murders innocent civilians, stockpiles rockets to shoot at cities, and supports the massacre of men, women and children in Syria." Yet, even after a Bulgarian court sent a Hezbollah operative to jail for his participation in the Burgas bombing, European countries continue to drag their feet. According to [The Times of Israel](#), because of Cyprus' friendship with Lebanon, it is unwilling to unilaterally declare Hezbollah a terrorist organization. However, [Ynet](#) reported that Bahrain recently became the first Arab country to officially blacklist Hezbollah. While Israel, the U.S., the United Kingdom and other states have classified the Shiite group as a terrorist organization, among the E.U. states, Holland is the only one that has added Hezbollah to their list. The United States must continue to pressure European states to crack down on the Lebanese group, a move that would significantly hamper Hezbollah's ability to engage in terrorist activity around the world. For more on Hezbollah, click [here](#).

Jewish tradition demands that we speak out when we witness the perversion of justice, especially when that injustice can lead to harm. Therefore, the U.S. must press the E.U. to officially call Hezbollah what it is—a terrorist group. ■

Sermon tidbits are intended for your use without attribution. Please feel free to use some or all of the material. Although it is not necessary, it is appreciated if copies of sermons or articles that use the ideas presented here are sent to synagogue@aipac.org.