

APRIL 22, 2013

Parashat Emor

Against Animal Cruelty

It and its son... (Leviticus 22:28)

אתו ואת בנו (ויקרא כב:כח)

Maimonides (Guide to the Perplexed Section 3) explains that the prohibition against slaughtering an animal and its child on the same day stems from the Jewish prohibition against cruelty to animals. We are cautioned “to guard and distance ourselves from slaughtering...the child before the eyes of the mother, [for] the anguish [caused to] living creatures in this [practice] is indeed great...” This prohibition appears in other contexts as well, including the prohibition against muzzling an animal during threshing (Deuteronomy 25:4) as well as the obligation to unburden an overloaded animal (see Exodus 23:5).

Through a number of different animal-related *mitzvot*, Judaism stresses the importance of preventing cruelty to animals. Today, Israel upholds this value by outlawing the force feeding of geese to produce a coveted gourmet food.

Foie gras, a delicacy in French cuisine, is actually a fatty liver produced by force feeding ducks or geese. Seven years ago, Israel banned this practice by including it in the country’s Animal Rights Law. Recently, a defendant’s conviction for force-feeding geese was overturned by an Israeli appeals court, as he claimed that his feeding tube minimized animal suffering. In response, Israel’s Ministry of Agriculture has [vowed](#) to take the case to Israel’s Supreme Court to prevent the return of the practice to the Jewish state. In a related development, one of Israel’s newest members of Knesset, American-born Rabbi Dov Lipman (Yesh Atid), recently introduced legislation to broaden the foie gras ban. According to [The Huffington Post](#), Lipman’s first piece of legislation is one that relates to “core Jewish values that people from a broad range of parties can relate around.”

Several *mitzvot* instruct us to respect animals and prevent unnecessary suffering. Israeli law today protects fowl from a force-feeding process that although yields a delicious delicacy, causes unnecessary animal suffering. ■

Study Leads to Action

And you shall keep my commandments (Leviticus 22:31)

ושמרתם מצותי (ויקרא כב:לא)

Noting the juxtaposition between the instruction to “keep my commandments” and the following phrase, “and do them” (22:31), Rashi explains that “keeping” alludes to “the study [of the commandments]” while “doing” alludes to “action.” Rashi emphasizes the importance of studying in order to properly fulfill the Torah. The Talmud (Kiddushin 40b) asks which is more important: study or action. While Rabbi Tarfon felt that action was more important, Rabbi Akiva felt that study was greater. Ultimately, the other sages sided with Rabbi Akiva, and declared that study is more important because “study [of a subject] leads to action.”

Rashi reminds us of the importance of studying as a critical prerequisite to proper action. After the recent bombing in Boston, doctors demonstrated the truth of this lesson, implementing emergency plans they learned from Israel.

The Jewish state has become a leader in designing techniques and technologies in the arenas of homeland security, counter-terrorism, and disaster-preparedness. During the recent explosions during the Boston Marathon, Israeli know-

how played a critical role in saving victims of the attack. “Unfortunately, we have great expertise,” Dr. Pinchas Halpern, director of emergency medicine at Tel Aviv’s Sourasky Medical Center said. The [Associated Press](#) reported that Halpern gave lectures in 2005 at Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Massachusetts General about responding to attacks and he has been in contact with doctors in Boston since the explosion. According to the [Algemeiner Journal](#), Alastair Conn, Chief of Emergency Services at Massachusetts General Hospital said, “About two years ago in actual fact we asked the Israelis to come across and they helped us set up our disaster team so that we could respond in this kind of manner.” In fact, Israeli experts regularly travel to the United States to share valuable information and expertise that helps to save American lives. FEMA and U.S. National Guard officials have traveled to Israel to study the Jewish state’s nation-wide emergency management drills and procedures. In January, the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative (NPLI) at the Harvard School of Public Health [brought its seventh delegation](#) of U.S. officials to visit Israel. Each delegation is designed to address issues related to mass casualty events and population resilience. “We are profoundly grateful to our colleagues in Israel for sharing their knowledge, particularly at the Ministry of Health,” said NPLI founding co-director Leonard Marcus. “The best practices and lessons learned are helping inform policy and practice in the United States.” For more on homeland security cooperation, click [here](#).

Rashi reminds us that you cannot have action without studying. Following the recent bombing in Boston, doctors and medics used Israeli knowledge and expertise to take action and save lives. ■

The Gift of Precariousness

And you shall dwell in booths (Leviticus 23:42)

בסכת תשבו (ויקרא כג:מב)

Jewish law specifically mandates that a Sukkah must be a temporary dwelling, open to the elements. Yet, specifically on Succot, we are commanded to “rejoice before the Lord” (23:40). How are we able to rejoice in such unprotected situation? Rabbi Tom Heyn writes that this precariousness is itself a gift. “When we understand the nature of impermanence, we become better suited to face the challenges we encounter in our daily lives...[and appreciate that] joy and impermanence are inextricably linked.” When we recognize that we can rejoice in even an unstable situation, we are able to find true joy in our lives, and focus on that which is truly important.

The precariousness of the Sukkah helps us appreciate the blessings in our lives. As Israel finds itself in a precarious situation, we can similarly appreciate the blessings that continue to protect the Jewish state.

Over the last two years, Israel’s position in the Middle East has grown increasingly perilous. The Arab spring has brought instability to Israel’s south, emboldening terrorist groups in the Sinai desert to initiate unprovoked attacks, such as the recent [rocket attack on Eilat](#). The smoldering civil war in Syria has reached into Israel as well, raising the dangerous possibility of Israel being drawn into the conflict. The ongoing talks with Iran have yet to lead to any tangible progress, while Iran continues to march towards nuclear weapons capability. Yet, at the same time, this instability offers a new understanding and appreciation for America’s friendship, and the stability and security that friendship has brought to the Jewish state. The Iron Dome system, which according to [The Jerusalem Post](#), was included in the Pentagon’s Missile Defense Agency’s regular annual budget for the first time, has established a buffer against short-range rocket attacks, allowing Israel to avoid becoming embroiled in costly and dangerous ground offensives. And, while the Iranian threat looms large, American leaders have voiced their full-throated support for the Jewish state’s right to self-defense. In a powerful statement, members of the U.S. Senate’s Foreign Relations Committee adopted [Senate Resolution 65](#), according to which the United States will support Israel in case it is compelled to take military action and actualize its right to self-defense in the face of an Iranian threat. The resolution—sponsored by Sen. Robert Menendez and Sen. Lindsey Graham—has successfully gained the support of 85 of the 100 senators and declares that the United States’ policy is to halt Iranian nuclear ambitions.

Just as sitting in the temporary Sukkah allows us to appreciate our blessings, Israel’s precarious situation, while challenging, allows us to better appreciate the blessing that is the American and Israel friendship. ■

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