



Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 12, 2013

Parashat Ki Teitzei

Helping Them Up

You shall surely help him to lift them up again (Deuteronomy 22:4)

הקם תקים עמו (דברים כב:ד)

Should one find his friend's animal buckling under its burden, he must assist his friend in unloading and reloading the animal. While many commentators explain that this commandment is based on alleviating the pain of the animal, Netziv (on 22:4) bases his comments on Machmonides (Laws of Murder and Guarding Life 13:1) and explains that the verse describes a case where the animal failed on a busy, dangerous road. The poor owner becomes paralyzed, unable to right the animal alone, but unwilling to abandon his merchandise. Netziv writes, "the underlying reason [for this commandment] is to save the life of the [owner] of the load, who stands confused over the donkey and its burden, and there is a danger to his life."

We right a fallen animal to help a paralyzed individual who is in a dangerous situation and unable to help himself. Recently, the U.S. found the Palestinian Authority in a similar predicament, and has encouraged it to return to peace talks that will hopefully move them in a helpful direction and bring great benefit to the Palestinian people.

For the past four years, while Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called for direct talks, Palestinian Authority President Abbas refused to meet. But recently, after intense U.S. diplomatic activity, the Palestinians finally agreed to return to negotiations, meeting with their Israeli counterparts in Washington. However, despite the fact that the parties agreed to enter into negotiations without preconditions, according to [Bloomberg News](#), Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said Israel's plan to start building homes in east Jerusalem jeopardized the peace talks. "Some people in Israel continue to believe that the endgame for negotiations should not be peace, but rather, further colonization. We call upon all parties that had vigorously advocated for the resumption of negotiations to do whatever is needed to block and to punish the latest decisions made by the Israeli government and the Occupation Municipality in Jerusalem." Netanyahu has taken bold steps in order to get these talks started, including agreeing to release, over the next few months, more than 100 Palestinians who have murdered Israelis. For the talks to have any chance at success, disagreements should be worked out privately, and both sides must be willing to make key compromises. Moreover, it is imperative that the Palestinians remain committed to the process and refrain from making statements or taking unilateral acts that jeopardize the talks. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

When someone is stuck in a bad situation, we are instructed to take action to help him. The United States must continue to take positive actions to encourage the Palestinians to choose peace and a better future. ■

Collective Punishment

The fathers shall not be put to death for the children (Deut. 24:16) (דברים כד:טז) לא יומתו אבות על בנים

Many commentators understand verse 24:16 to explain that the Torah forbids the court from punishing parents for the sins of their children, or visa-versa. Netziv (in Ha'amek Davar on 24:16) rejects this interpretation, due to the principals outlined in Jewish law requiring proof of deliberate acts in order for the court to punish. Instead, he explains that this verse addresses the monarchy "which is able to kill for an issue related to the monarchy... nonetheless, it is not permitted to kill a father for [the sin of] a child or a child for [the sin of] the father." According

to Netziv's interpretation the Torah forbids a Jewish leader from inflicting collective punishment. Only those who perpetrate acts can be punished, and not their relatives in an immoral attempt to instill fear and terror.

While the Torah prohibits—and civilized countries have long rejected—the notion of inflicting collective punishment, the Assad regime in Syria has readily utilized collective punishment in its brutal crackdown against Syrian rebels.

With the Syrian Civil War now in its third year, Assad and his regime have killed more than 100,000 people protesting his autocratic rule. Throughout the conflict the regime has engaged in an ongoing campaign of collective punishment, hoping to crush the spirit of the opposition. Last March, the head of the United Nations panel probing human rights abuses in Syria excoriated the regime for numerous human rights violations. Paulo Pinheiro, chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, [told](#) the U.N. Human Right Council in Geneva, “Some children were targeted by snipers; others were victims of indiscriminate shelling. Force used by the Government against armed groups often led to collective punishment of civilians. In late August, activists decried the aerial [bombings](#) of ten bakeries in Aleppo province, as civilians lined up to buy bread. Later in the year, [Reuters](#) reported that, “Syrian army bulldozers razed houses in western Damascus...pursuing what activists called the first campaign of collective punishment targeting people's property in areas of the capital hostile to President Bashar al-Assad.” This heinous tactic continues to today. Recently, [The New York Times](#) reported on a young girl in Syria who was injured by a shell as she shopped in the supermarket. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

The Torah expressly forbids collective punishment of fathers for their sons' sins. Sadly, Syria willfully ignores this moral imperative by punishing civilians in order to brutally crush the uprising against the Assad dictatorship. ■

Keep Speaking Out

You shall not forget (Deuteronomy 25:19)

לֹא תִשְׁכַּח (דְּבָרִים כה:יט)

The Talmud (Megillah 18) wonders why the Torah commands us to “remember” (25:17) both that which Amalek did, and also to “not forget.” The Talmud explains that we “remember” with our minds, but we “do not forget” with our mouths. Rabbi Yehoram Mazor explains that today, as the ancient nation of Amalek no longer exists, the obligation to blot out the remembrance of Amalek is an educational and ethical imperative. “To fulfill this commandment we must guard in our hearts and remember with our mouths the evil of Amalek. We must continue to tell this story until the [evil] influence of Amalek no longer exists in the world.”

It is not enough to remember the presence of evil; we must use the power of our speech to remove it from the world. Today, this imperative requires us to speak out against the growing evil percolating in Iran.

[NBC News](#) recently noted after “Moderate cleric [Hasan] Rouhani” was sworn in as president of Iran that “Officials in the West have watched Rouhani with the hope of more moderate leadership.” Yet, Rouhani has yet to demonstrate any willingness to halt Iran's nuclear enrichment program. Moreover, just days after his appointment, according to [The Daily Telegraph](#), Rouhani, who was attending rallies to mark Iranian solidarity with Palestinians said that, “The Zionist regime has been a wound on the body of the Islamic world for years and the wound should be removed...” Condemning the comments, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that, “The President there has changed but the goal of the regime has not: To achieve nuclear weapons in order to threaten Israel, the Middle East and the peace and security of the entire world. A country that threatens the destruction of the state of Israel must not be allowed to possess weapons of mass destruction.” As the international community looks to engage in meaningful dialogue with Iran, it cannot forget that Iran's illicit nuclear activities continue, and that although Iran has a new president, the country has moved ever closer to its goal of nuclear weapons capability. It is our job to speak out and continue to ratchet up the economic pressure on Tehran. For more on Iran, click [here](#).

We both remember Amalek and “do not forget” by speaking out against evil in the world. We must continue to speak out and insist that the United States apply biting economic sanctions on Iran until it halts its nuclear program. ■