



Sermon Tidbits

JANUARY 20, 2014

Parashat Mishpatim

Permission to Heal

And [he] shall cause him to be thoroughly healed (Exodus 20:14)

ורפא ירפא (שמות כא:יד)

Parashat Mishpatim teaches that one must pay for the medical bills of an individual he injures. Contradictory, in the Amidah, the prayer for health concludes by blessing God as the “healer of the sick of His nation of Israel.” In the Torah, God tells the Nation of Israel, “for I am the LORD that heals you” (15:26). If so, would seeking medical help from a human doctor constitute a lack of religious faith? The sages in the Talmud (Baba Kama 85a) explained, “from this [verse] we see that permission was given to the doctor to heal.” Rabbi Yosef Caro in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 336:1) explains: “The Torah gave permission to the doctor to heal, and it is a mitzvah...”

At Sinai, along with the commandments of the Torah, Moses received permission to use our human ingenuity to heal others. Today, medical innovations developed in Israel are healing millions of people around the world.

Israeli companies are constantly developing revolutionary medical treatments that are now in use throughout the world. Recently, Israel21c released its list of [Ten Medical Advances to Watch in 2014](#). These included a device that can detect lung cancer that won a \$1 million development grant last year from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, an oral insulin capsule for type-2 diabetes, a new contact-free detection system for breast cancer, and a blood test to detect early-stage Alzheimer’s disease. These are only a few small examples of the hundreds of medical innovations that Israeli companies are currently developing. From bacteria-resistant fabric to innovative surgical lasers, Israel has grown to become a force in the field of developing medical technology. Moreover, in addition to developing medical breakthroughs, Israelis are happy to share their medical knowledge with others around the world. According to Israel’s [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), a team of medical professionals from Jerusalem’s Herzog Hospital recently began a series of video conferences with St. Joseph Hospital in Jirapa—a rural region serving a predominantly poor farming population in Ghana—to provide additional medical training that will enhance the knowledge base of medical practitioners in the hospital. For more on Israel around the world, click [here](#).

With its amazing list of ongoing medical breakthroughs and a strong desire to share its ability to heal others, Israel is taking a primary role in the mitzvah to heal, which has been an essential element of Jewish tradition since Sinai. ■

Protecting the Weak

You shall not afflict any widow, or orphan (Exodus 22:21)

כל אלמנה ויתום לא תענום (שמות כב:כא)

The prohibition against the affliction and persecution of the “widow and orphan” is also a direct command to care for and address the needs of the weakest in society. Explaining the rationale for this commandment, the author of Sefer Hachinuch (Commandment 65) writes, “For [the widow and the orphan] are the weakest [people] who have no one to make claims [on their behalf]...For this reason, our complete Torah warns us to acquire the attribute of kindness and compassion in our souls, to be righteous in our actions [towards them].”

A foundational Jewish value is to have compassion for the oppressed. Today, the international community must take this message to heart, and take action to provide food for the starving citizens of the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria.

The Syrian regime continues to brutally crush the growing protest movement within the country while maintaining its support for terrorist groups. Meanwhile, growing numbers of devastated refugees in the neighborhood of Yarmouk in Damascus, Syria are living without food or medicine. According to the [Associated Press](#), “Children, the elderly and others displaced by Syria’s civil war are starving to death in a besieged camp where women brave sniper fire to forage for food just minutes from the relative prosperity of Damascus.” [The Washington Post](#) reported that, “Fighters loyal to the government of President Bashar al-Assad surround numerous rebel-held neighborhoods, notably in the suburbs of Damascus, and refuse to allow access to food or medical aid as part of what U.S. and other Western leaders have repeatedly described as a policy of deliberate obstruction.” Almost fifty people have died since October from starvation, illness or lack of access to medical care in the Yarmouk refugee camp, where tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees are trapped by a Syrian government blockade. All of the victims have been children and the elderly. According to [Reuters](#), a United Nations convoy of trucks attempting to enter the camp had to turn back when it was fired upon with machine gun and mortar fire. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

The Torah insists that we protect the weak, including the widow and the orphan, who cannot protect themselves. The world must protect the refugees in Yarmouk, Syria, who continue to suffer as victims of a brutal civil war. ■

Essential Transparency

You shall not utter a false report (Exodus 23:1)

לֹא תִשָּׂא שִׁמְעַע שׁוּא (שְׁמוֹת כג:א)

While it seems obvious that Judaism forbids uttering falsehoods, especially in a court, the Sages interpreted this verse to carry important additional meaning. Maimonides (Laws of Sanhedrin 21:7) writes, “A judge is forbidden from hearing the words of one of the litigants before his fellow [litigant] arrives, or not in the presence of his adversary—even [saying] a single thing is forbidden...and any [judge] that hears from one [party without the presence of the other] violates a negative commandment, as it is written, ‘You shall not utter a false report.’”

Jewish law requires complete transparency and prohibits secret talks without the knowledge of all involved. Today, as the U.S. and Iran finalize their nuclear agreement, the parties must adhere to these same requirements.

Recently, after the Obama Administration announced the finalization of the six-month interim agreement with Iran, it was revealed that there was an additional, informal agreement whose details had not been released. Iran’s chief negotiator Abbas Araqchi disclosed the existence of the document in a Persian-language interview with the semiofficial Iranian Students News Agency. According to [The Los Angeles Times](#), “In the interview, Araqchi referred to the side agreement using the English word ‘nonpaper,’ a diplomatic term used for an informal side agreement that doesn’t have to be disclosed publicly.” The scope of this undisclosed agreement took on great significance when Araqchi reported that according to the accord, “No [nuclear] facility will be closed; enrichment will continue, and qualitative and nuclear research will be expanded. All research into a new generation of centrifuges will continue.” According to [The Times of Israel](#), U.S. Senators who have been pressing to impose additional sanction on the Iranian regimes should negotiations fail responded with concern over the revelation. The Senators were worried about a “secret side deal” with the Islamic Republic over its nuclear program, and urged the Obama administration to come clean to lawmakers on the substance of an interim agreement reached in Geneva.” Senior administration officials [conceded](#) that Iran would be able to continue nuclear research and development. Following the announced agreement, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s Twitter account [tweeted](#) that world powers had “surrendered to Iranian nation’s will.” As the six-month negotiation period begins, the U.S. must release the full details of the entire agreement with Iran. Only full transparency can instill confidence that the talks can bring about a peaceful resolution to the Iranian nuclear crisis. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

In matters of jurisprudence, Jewish law demands openness and transparency among all parties. It is important for the United States to follow this example in its dealings with the Islamic Republic. ■

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