

MARCH 24, 2014

Parashat Tazria - Hachodesh

An Evaluation Period

Then the priest shall shut up (Leviticus 13:4)

והסגיר הכהן (ויקרא יג:ד)

When a tzara'at affliction had not yet formed fully, the afflicted individual had an interim period to reflect on the sinful behavior that brought about the tzara'at. The priest must "shut up" the afflicted individual for seven days. Should a subsequent examination reveal no change, he would be shut up for another seven day period. If, after that second period, "the plague dimmed" (verse 6) then the individual would be deemed clean. Yet, Rashi (on verse 6) notes that "if the affliction remained unchanged...he would be [deemed] unclean." Rather than utilizing the quarantine as an opportunity for reflection and introspection, the afflicted individual's failure to initiate any change at all represents a sign of impurity.

Like the individual afflicted with tzara'at who fails to use his interim period for introspection and change, Iran has given no indication during the six month negotiation period that it wishes to change its hateful, extremist behaviors.

Another round of talks between the P5+1 nations and Iran concluded with [both sides calling the talks](#) "substantive and useful". Yet, while the world negotiates with Iran's over its nuclear program, Iran continues to manifests the dangerous, destructive behavior that makes the prospect of an Iranian nuclear weapon so dangerous. Earlier this month, Israel seized an illegal Iranian weapons shipment to Gaza terrorists. The shipment of advanced rockets and other weapons to Gaza included dozens of Syrian-manufactured M-302 rockets with a range of about 100 miles. A special U.N. report on Iranian human rights abuses found no improvement under President Rouhani and blasted Tehran for "amputations, flogging, increased application of the death penalty, arbitrary detention and unfair trials." The report criticized the "surge" of executions in Iran last year, numbering at least 176 in 2014, including the execution of two gay men for the crime of "perversion." Finally, despite the ongoing negotiations, Iran continues its efforts to procure key components for its nuclear and missile program. Iran's ongoing support for terrorism, human rights abuses, and flouting of U.N. Security Council resolutions will make it much more difficult to conclude a successful negotiation over Tehran's illicit nuclear program. It also makes it essential that any final agreement require Iran to dismantle existing facilities and submit to an extraordinarily thorough inspections regime.

Like the "evaluation period" for tzara'at, the six-month negotiation period represents a unique opportunity to evaluate whether Iran is interested in change and improvement. Thus far, the answer is clearly "no". ■

Spreading Danger

He shall dwell alone (Leviticus 13:46)

בדד ישב (ויקרא יג:מו)

Once the priest declared the tzara'at unclean, the afflicted was sent outside the camp where he must "dwell alone", in quarantine until the affliction dissipated. Why was he put into quarantine for a spiritual affliction? Rashi (on verse 46) explains that his isolation serves as a punishment for speaking slander and causing divisions in society. Yet, Da'at Zekeinim (on verse 46) writes that the "the disease spreads to people who are in regular contact with him." While tzara'at was initiated through sinful behavior, it could be transmitted through physical contact, and quarantine was necessary to prevent the spread of the disease.

According to Da'at Zekeinim, an individual afflicted with tzara'at could transmit the disease to those around him. As the turmoil in Syria continues, the entire region including Israel is in danger of “catching” the spreading violence.

Last week, terrorists based in Syria detonated a roadside bomb inside Israel along the Syrian border, injuring four Israeli soldiers. Israel responded with airstrikes against “a Syrian Army training facility, a military headquarters and artillery batteries that had ‘aided and abetted’ the bomb attack,” the [New York Times](#) reported. The roadside bomb represented the third bomb or attempted attack inside Israel over the last two weeks, which appeared to be attempts at revenge for airstrikes against weapons transfers from Syria to Hezbollah. In addition, the [Washington Post](#) recently reported that an influx of militants from Syria have bolstered the ranks of extremist groups in the region. Ehud Yaari [writes](#) that developing terrorist cells in Syria might give “al-Qaeda freedom of action over a vast area stretching from west of Baghdad to southern Syria.” Commenting on the bombing attempts, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said that, “The frontier with Syria has been filling up recently with jihadi elements and Hezbollah, and this presents a new challenge to the state of Israel. In recent years we have succeeded in preserving the quiet in the face of the civil war in Syria, and we will act with forcefulness to preserve Israel’s security.”

The tzara'at affliction required quarantine to prevent the spread of the disease. Today, if the world fails to quarantine the growing influence of Hezbollah and other terrorist groups in Syria, unrest could spread across the Middle East. ■

Proper Preparation – Parashat Hachodesh

This month shall be unto you (Exodus 12:2)

החדש הזה לכם (שמות יב:ב)

On the Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh Nissan, we read Parashat Hachodesh (Exodus 12:1-20), the last of the four special readings during the weeks surrounding Purim. Eliyahu Kitov (see Book of Our Heritage vol. 2 p. 118) noting that the reading includes the original commandment to offer the Paschal lamb writes that, “this reading, which reminded the people that [the month of] Nisan was at hand, also reminded them of the approach of Passover, so that they could make preparations for the pilgrimage”. Today, of all the holidays in the Jewish calendar, Passover requires the greatest level of preparation. Thus, the Sages’ institution still serves as an important reminder to properly prepare for the looming Passover holiday just two weeks away.

Parshat Hachodesh reminds us of the importance of proper preparation. Recently, a Yale University study demonstrated that proper preparation has saved countless lives from the relentless rocket attacks from Gaza.

Earlier this month, when terrorist groups in Gaza fired over seventy rockets at southern Israel, the international media barely mentioned the attack. Professor Edward H. Kaplan, a specialist in engineering and public health from the Yale School of Management, after encountering several instances in which international media dismissed the threat of Gazan rockets, noted a concerted attempt by many to portray Kassam rockets as essentially harmless weapons. Yet, the [Jerusalem Post](#) reported that in a study that he conducted with his former student Lian Zucker, Kaplan discovered that the Kassam rockets are indeed quite deadly, but Israel’s casualty rate remained low due to a different factor: proper preparation. “Israel has invested large sums of money in civil defense infrastructure in southern Israel. Safe rooms, bomb shelters, the Red Dawn early warning system and most recently the Iron Dome collectively shield civilians from Kassams,” Kaplan said. Kaplan and Zucker applied shrapnel/casualty and spatial allocation models to the population of Sederot to estimate casualties per randomly aimed rocket fired in the absence of civil defenses. “The results were very clear,” Kaplan said. “In the best case, there would be three times as many casualties as observed in Sederot. In the worst case, there would be nine times as many casualties. In the intermediate case – which we would argue best describes ‘a day in the life of Sederot’ – there would be seven times as many casualties. These rockets are not harmless; rather casualties are low because Israel is protecting its citizens via its civil defense infrastructure.”

Parshat Hachodesh reminds us that the low casualty rates in Israel’s south result not from the mistaken notion that Kassam rockets are harmless, but instead due to Israel’s insistence on proper preparation. ■

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