



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 3, 2014

Parashat Vayikra

Creating a Constructive Environment

When any man of you brings an offering (Leviticus 1:2)

אדם כי יקריב מכם (ויקרא א:ב)

The Alshich (on 1:2) notes that the text describes the sinner as a singular individual—“any man.” Why does the text switch to the plural form later in the very same verse when commanding that “you shall bring your offering” (1:2). He explains that while an individual is certainly responsible for his own sins, we cannot absolve his friends and acquaintances from guilt. They are responsible, “for they did not warn him in a manner that would have prevented him from sinning.” With this in mind, he offers a novel reading of the verse, explaining that, “When any man brings [an offering of sin]”—*mikem*—“it is because of you, his community which failed to act sufficiently...”

Alshich reminds us that a community is obligated to take action to create an environment which prevents sin. Today, the United States must bolster efforts to create an environment that will prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon.

When the United States together with five international partners signed the Joint Plan of Action with Iran in Geneva late last year, it stated that the six month negotiation period represented an opportunity to create an environment of understanding between Iran and the international community. Given a partial reprieve from the biting economic sanctions, Iran has pushed forward in its nuclear research and insisted that it will never relinquish its right to enrich uranium. [The Times of Israel](#) recently reported that Iran’s nuclear chief declared that his country has developed a new generation of centrifuges 15 times more powerful than those currently being used to enrich uranium, and said it might resume enrichment to 60 percent. Moreover, Iran has clearly indicated that it [will not negotiate](#) its right to enrich uranium, nor would discuss its ballistic missile program. While U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman insisted that Iran’s ballistic missile program would be addressed in the comprehensive deal, Iran Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqch called the defense-related issues a red line for Iran saying, “We will not allow such issues to be discussed in future talks.” The U.S. must encourage Iran to take the negotiations seriously by clearly demonstrating that should the negotiations fail, the United States will immediately impose greater economic sanctions and international isolation. Diplomacy must be backed by a clear choice for the Iranian government: either it dismantles its nuclear program or faces further isolation. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The international community created the environment that brought Iran to the negotiating table. Today, it must press Iran and foster a global environment that ensures Iran never commits the terrible sin of acquiring nuclear weapons. ■

Doing Our Part

A sweet savor (Leviticus 1:17)

ריח ניחוח (ויקרא א:יז)

An individual who wished to present a burnt offering in the Tabernacle had the option of presenting an animal, if he was wealthy, a bird, if his means were modest, or even a meal offering, should he be impoverished. Rashi notes (on 1:17) that both the bird offering and the animal offering (1: 9) are called “a sweet savor” to God. “This is to teach you that [the offering of] both the one who gives much, and one who gives less [are considered sweet]—as long as [the giver’s] intention is for the sake of heaven.” Every offering, when given with love and dedication, carried great significance and meaning, irrespective of its monetary value. Each gift represented a “sweet savor.”

Just as every sincere offering at the Tabernacle was valued and cherished, we must also cherish the unique effort of each and every individual who gives his or her time, effort and energy to build a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

The strong bond shared between the United States and Israel is a testament to the shared values and mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries. Yet, the strength of this bond also depends on the tireless efforts of literally thousands of lay people together with the professionals who help coordinate and guide them. In these efforts, each of us can and must play a role. There are strong voices that can powerfully convey the values of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship in newspapers, editorials and on the internet. Others excel in the political arena, building meaningful relationships with our local and nationally elected officials. Some prefer to devote their time and energy to grass roots efforts while others might best support the effort financially, providing the means critical to maintaining this combined effort. Each individual contribution represents a critical aspect of the overall effort. Without any one of them, the mutual benefits that country enjoys would be significantly diminished. This relationship keeps America and the Jewish state safer, stronger and better equipped to handle the challenges that come our way. For more on the U.S.-Israel relationship, click [here](#).

Like the sacrifices in the Tabernacle, every single effort, large and small, when given with devotion and love, represents a critical element of our collective effort to support a strong, U.S.-Israel partnership. ■

A Peace Offering

And if his offering be a sacrifice of peace-offerings (Leviticus 3:1) (ויקרא ג:א)

Why does the text call this specific sacrifice a “peace” offering? Yalkut Meam Loez (Vayikra 1, p. 36) explains that while Jewish law obligated an individual to offer most of the other types of sacrifices as atonement for sin or purification from defilement, the peace offering was entirely voluntary, given without any coercion, out of a genuine desire to bring an offering to God. Since the offering was brought voluntarily and not as a result of negative behavior it “established peace between heaven and earth.” True peace comes not from coercion or force, but from a genuine desire for coexistence and mutual understanding.

The peace offering was named so because it represented the genuine desire to give without force or coercion. This reminds us that true, lasting peace in the Middle East can only come without coercion, from a genuine desire from both parties to arrive at a resolution to the conflict.

Since the resumption of peace talks in the summer of 2013, Israel has taken important steps to improve the daily lives of the Palestinians and enhance the prospects for productive dialogue. Over recent months, Israel has provided direct assistance and facilitated cooperative programs to improve Palestinian daily life. Among other steps, Israel provided new employment opportunities within the Jewish state for West Bank Palestinians; enabled a 15 percent increase above the prior year in the volume of gas imports into Gaza; and signed a regional water deal that will provide millions of cubic meters of drinking water to Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians. Moreover, Israel has demonstrated its willingness to take difficult steps both to facilitate talks and to boost the Palestinian leadership’s domestic authority, including the recent release of 76 convicted Palestinian terrorists. Yet, these steps must be matched by the Palestinian Authority, which must demonstrate a genuine desire for peace. It must do so by honoring its promise not to pursue anti-Israel measures in international bodies, refraining from anti-Israel incitement, and rather than inciting the Palestinian population against Israel, educating the Palestinian people about the benefits of peace. While Israel is committed to the peace negotiations with the Palestinians and hopes they are successful, any successful effort will require direct negotiations between the two parties without outside coercion. Only when both parties truly desire peace will an agreement be possible. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

The sacrifice that was offered without force or coercion was named the “peace” offering, teaching us that true peace stems not from force of coercion, but from a genuine inner desire for coexistence. ■

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