

APRIL 20, 2014

Parashat Kedoshim

Hateful Speech, Hateful Acts

You shall not curse the deaf (Leviticus 19:14)

לא תקלל חרש (ויקרא יט:יד)

While the verse prohibits cursing only the deaf, the Midrash (Sifra Kedoshim 2:13) expands the verse to prohibit cursing anyone at all – whether they can hear the curse or not. Maimonides (Sefer Hamitzvot Negative Commandment 317) explains that the prohibition against the deaf is based not only in concern for the well-being of the recipient of the curse, but for the individual who uttered it. “For he is warned not to arouse his soul to vengeance, nor should he accustom himself to hatred.” We must refrain from harmful verbal expressions that arouse hatred and anger, because they incite further hatred which ultimately leads to violence.

In the prohibition against cursing others, the Torah warns us that hateful words incite anger and hatred that can lead to violence. Sadly, the Jewish world witnessed two tragic examples of this phenomenon during the days before Passover.

In the days leading up to Passover, Jewish communities both in the United States and Israel witnessed first-hand the frightening transformation of hateful, harmful speech into outright murder. In Kansas City, MO, Glenn Miller, aka Frazier Glenn Cross, an outspoken white supremacist who was once a ‘grand dragon’ of the Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, killed three people outside two Jewish community buildings. According to [Reuters](#), “Cross was known by law enforcement and human rights groups as a former senior member of the Ku Klux Klan movement and someone who has repeatedly expressed hatred for Jewish people.” In Israel, just days later, and hours before the onset of Passover, Baruch Mizrachi, an intelligence officer in the Israeli police, “was fatally shot and his wife and young son were wounded...as they drove to a Passover Seder near the West Bank city of Hebron,” the [New York Times](#) reported. Witnesses reported seeing a man in a helmet firing a Kalashnikov rifle at several passing cars. Hamas and Islamic Jihad [praised the shooting](#) and warned of more to come. Responding to the attacks, Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu [said](#), “This reprehensible murder of a man who was traveling with his family to a meal for the Festival of Freedom is the result of the incitement for which the Palestinian Authority is responsible.”

The Torah reminds us that cursing another reflects and reinforces hatred and anger. The brutal murder of innocents in Kansas City and Israel highlight the true danger of hateful speech and its very real results. ■

An Important Rebuke

You shall surely rebuke your neighbor (Leviticus 19:17)

הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך (ויקרא יט:יז)

Expounding on the obligation to rebuke the sinner, the Talmud (Shabbat 54b) elaborates, “Anyone who has the ability to protest...regarding matters around the entire world and fails to do so is held responsible for the [sins] of entire world.” Rabbi Shai Peron [adds](#) that “People of stature...cannot shirk their responsibilities in the face of criminal acts that they have witnessed. And those who can influence an entire country...must raise their voices” in protest. When we witness the miscarriage of justice and the extolling of sinful virtues, we must speak out and give rebuke.

Following the obligation to speak out at the miscarriage of justice, members of the United States Congress spoke out in protest over the selection of an Iranian ambassador to the United Nations associated with the 1979 hostage crisis.

Iran recently named Hamid Aboutalebi as its next ambassador to the United Nations. Aboutalebi has been linked to a student group that led the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979 and a crisis in which 52 American diplomats and staff were held hostage for 444 days, prompting the U.S. to break diplomatic ties with Iran. According to [Time Magazine](#), outraged by his involvement in the 1979 hostage-taking in Tehran, Congress unanimously passed legislation to formally bar Aboutalebi from entering the country. The bill, signed into law by President Obama, would bar representatives to the United Nations from entering the U.S. if such persons have engaged in espionage or terrorist activities against the United States. The Obama administration [announced](#) that it would not grant a visa to Aboutalebi, whose application had been pending for months. In a letter to House leaders, Representative Doug Lamborn, a Colorado Republican who sponsored the bill in the House [said that](#), “It is unconscionable that someone who participated in a terrorist activity aimed at our diplomats would be welcomed into our country as an ambassador and granted diplomatic immunity.”

We are commanded to give rebuke when we see sinful activity. In denying a visa to a diplomat who was involved in the taking of American hostages, the United States is sending a powerful, important message of rebuke to Iran. ■

Universal Caring

Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)

ואהבת לרעך כמוך (ויקרא יט:יח)

We all recognize Rabbi Akiva’s famous dictum: “Love your neighbor as yourself – this is a great rule in the Torah.” Yet, the Talmud (Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4) juxtaposes Rabbi Akiva’s dictum with that of Ben Azzai, who said, “This is the book of the generations of Adam’ (Genesis 5:1) – this is an even greater rule.” What is the meaning of Ben Azzai’s teaching? Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein (see Tosefet Brachah vol. 3. p. 161) explains that Ben Azzai emphasizes the importance of the brotherhood of man, and teaches us to act on behalf not only of the Jewish people, but for the betterment of all mankind, as [the reference to] Adam “includes every nation and language.”

Ben Azzai teaches us that we must act not only for ourselves and our neighbors, but for the betterment of the entire world. A recent American program aimed at achieving this goal brought a critical new aircraft to Israel’s Air Force.

The United States’ [Foreign Military Sales \(FMS\) program](#) is a form of security assistance authorized by the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), and a fundamental tool of U.S. foreign policy, which permits the US to sell defense articles and services to foreign countries and international organizations that will strengthen the security of the U.S. and promote world peace. This program has played a fundamental role in America’s military assistance to Israel, and was the mechanism through which the United States supplied a new, advanced transport plane to Israel’s Air Force.

Earlier this month, the first C-130J Super Hercules airlifter, ordered [through a FMS contract](#) with the US government, arrived at Nevatim Air Base. According to the [Times of Israel](#), the updated transport plane can be refueled in midair, fly 30% farther than the Rhino (its predecessor) which carried Israel’s troops to Entebbe, and can carry 25% more weight – in vehicles, paratroopers, ground forces and wounded soldiers. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon said that modifications to the plane, dubbed the Shimshon, “allow us to upgrade the strategic and long arm of the State of Israel and to operate precisely and effectively in any theater, in any sort of warfare, in the immediate vicinity and the more distant.” Ya’alon [thanked US Ambassador Dan Shapiro](#), while stressing the importance of the plane to Israeli-American diplomatic relations. “Here...we see the strengthening of the connection between countries...a relationship based on shared values and interests.” Speaking on behalf of Lockheed Martin, which built the planes in Marietta, Ga, Chairman, President and CEO Marillyn Hewson said that, “All of us at Lockheed Martin are proud to support the Israel Defense Force in its mission to protect and defend the State of Israel...Shimshon [was] a leader whose power was thought to be as mighty as the sun. Shimshon used his power to combat the enemies of Israel and perform heroic feats. In the same way this aircraft will support the defense of Israel.”

Ben Azzai teaches us that we must act out of concern for not only ourselves, but the entire world. That concern has led the US to create a program that is helping Israel defend itself and protect the peace in the Middle East. ■

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