



Sermon Tidbits

DECEMBER 7, 2015

Parashat Miketz - Hanukkah

Coming Clean

I make mention of my faults this day (Genesis 41:9)

את הטאיי אני מזכיר היום (בראשית מא:ט)

One of the wonderful aspects of the Modern Hebrew language is the integration of famous biblical and Talmudic phrases in the modern vernacular. We find one such example from Parashat Vayeshev. If a Hebrew speaker wishes to confess a past transgression, she might choose to preface her admission with a quote from Pharaoh's chief butler, who prefaces his comments to the Egyptian king with the phrase: *Et chata'ai ani mazkir hayom*—"I make mention of my faults this day..." (verse 9) What is the source of this interesting phrase?

After experiencing two troubling dreams, the Egyptian Pharaoh sensed that his dreams carried an important message, but no one—not his advisers, sorcerers or anyone else—could interpret the dreams to his satisfaction. The butler suddenly remembered how he too had troubling dreams while he sat in prison, and how a young Hebrew named Joseph had correctly interpreted his dream. Yet, in mentioning Joseph, the butler would also have to remind the king of his past crime, which he would rather not mention. So, in order to mitigate the sting of the reminder, he prefaces his comments with this seemingly minor phrase: "I make mention of my faults this day." S'forno (on verse 9) explains that the butler intends this phrase, "Not as a complaint that you placed me in prison, for it was due to my faults." In essence, through this simple phrase, the butler accepts the blame for his past crime, while hoping to move forward. The phrase *et chatai* in modern Hebrew is a colloquial way of saying, "I'm sorry for what I did. I accept responsibility for my actions, and hope to move forward." According to a colloquial [Hebrew phrase dictionary](#), the phrase carries the connotation that, "I am compelled to mention my past sins, which are always kept in my heart." One mentions this phrase when he feels so distressed about his past actions that he is compelled to confess and accept responsibility.

We innately recognize the importance of accepting responsibility for one's actions as a critical component of *Teshuva*. Modern society expresses a willingness to forgive sinners, as long as they are willing to admit their past mistakes and sincerely commit to change. This reality makes Iran's ongoing behavior, and its refusal to accept responsibility for its past sins, all the more distressing. A core element of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran and the international community called for a comprehensive report on Iran's past military activity related to nuclear weapons. [The White House published](#), "Key Excerpts" of the agreement, which include provisions for "Transparency and Confidence Building Measures." This section states that, "Iran will fully implement the 'Roadmap for Clarification of Past and Present Outstanding Issues' agreed with the IAEA, containing arrangements to address past and present issues of concern relating to its nuclear program."

Rather than coming clean on past military dimensions (PMDs), Tehran has made every effort to muddy the waters and [prevent a complete and accurate accounting of its past nuclear activity](#). According to the official IRNA news agency, Admiral Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), the country's highest security body which was tasked with overseeing the nuclear deal, [said](#) "Without the closure of the file regarding past issues [PMD], there is no possibility of implementing the JCPOA," Yet, rather than assisting in the IAEA probe, and providing all the materials needed to "close the file," Iran obfuscated, stonewalled, and otherwise failed to live up to its obligations.

Iran has long denied seeking to develop an atomic weapons capability, insisting its nuclear program is for "peaceful

energy production and medical purposes only.” Additionally, Iran maintains its farcical denial in the face of a mountain of evidence of military nuclear research that says otherwise. If Iran refuses to admit past sins, how can anyone accept its commitment to never repeat a sin they deny ever committing? Instead of “coming clean,” Iran seems even more determined than ever to cloud the past in order to continue its nuclear weapons research in the future. For this reason, the IAEA must continue its investigation into the possible military dimensions of Iran’s nuclear program until it is satisfied that Iran has come clean. ■

Hanukkah – The Holiday of Energy Conservation

These lights are holy (Hanukkah prayer)

הנרות הללו קודש הם (תפילה של חנוכה)

At its core, the miracle of Hanukkah is a miracle of conservation. While the Maccabees certainly weren’t intending to do so, the miracle of the single cruse of oil represents how the priests in the Temple managed to wrestle eight days of light out of a single day’s oil supply—a story of miraculous energy conservation. So, according to the very first answer to a very famous Hanukkah question, the priests were in fact the very first Jewish energy conservationists.

In his well-known halachic work “*Beit Yosef*” (Orach Chaim 670), Rabbi Yosef Karo asks perhaps the most famous question related to Jewish law: Why is Hanukkah eight nights? The answer seems obvious—because the candles in the Temple in Jerusalem burned for eight nights! Yet, Rabbi Karo astutely notes that the priests had found a cruse of oil which would last a single night. Thus, the miracle of the oil lasted only seven nights long—and not the full eight. Why then do we light for eight nights, if only seven of them were the result of a miracle? This famous question has occupied rabbis literally for centuries, to the point that in 1962, Rabbi Yerachmiel Zelcer published a work entitled “*Ner L’meah*” (literally, “A Light for a Hundred”) that offered one hundred different answers to this famous question. Rabbi Karo himself explains that while the cruse of oil could have lasted an entire day, the priests realized that they needed enough oil to last for eight days before new, pure oil could be procured. So, they only filled the lamps of the Menorah in the Temple with an eighth of the necessary oil. That small amount miraculously lasted for the entire day. Faced with an energy shortage, the priests made the wise decision to conserve their resources in order to maximize its potential benefit over time.

Today, when confronted with energy shortages, we cannot expect a Hanukkah miracle to save us. While current fossil fuel sources will last for the foreseeable future, we all realize that they won’t last forever. More importantly, the burning of those fossil fuels has prompted a climate crisis that threatens global stability. Like other countries, Israel is doing its part to develop energy-saving technologies that promise to change the global energy equation. According to the [Times of Israel](#), today fully 60 percent of the energy for the area from Eilat to the Dead Sea comes from solar energy. By 2020, 100 percent of the daytime energy consumption in the region will be from solar, and by 2025, 100 percent of all energy, day and night will come from solar energy. This summer, Arava Power installed a 40 megawatt field at Kibbutz Ketura, which supplies a third of Eilat’s daytime energy. In the next five years, a 60 megawatt field will be constructed around nearby Timna, allowing the region full energy independence.

In addition, Israel’s active involvement in the area of renewable energy is opening doors to the Jewish state around the world. Israel’s Foreign Ministry recently announced that as Israel is a member state of International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), it has decided to open a permanent mission to the organization in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, despite the fact that Israel has no official relationship with the UAE. According to [Israel21c](#), “This will be the first Israeli mission located in a country with which Israel has no diplomatic ties, and the first time current Israeli citizens will go to live in the UAE.”

As we light the Hanukkah lamps this week and remember the great miracle of conservation, we should also marvel that the modern Jewish state has made great strides in energy conservation, and recommit ourselves to doing our part to ensure that the world has enough energy to produce light for centuries to come. ■

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