



Sermon Tidbits

APRIL 13, 2015

Parashat Shemini

Standing at Attention

And Aaron held his peace (Leviticus 10:3)

וַיִּקְרָא יְיָ (ויקרא י:ג)

Parashat Shemini bridges between two important days that were recently added to the Jewish calendar. Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed this past Thursday, and Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day for fallen soldiers, which will be observed in Israel next Wednesday. On both days of remembrance, as sirens wail across the country, citizens of Israel stand silent to honor and remember the six million murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust, and then, a week later, the siren blares for the many thousands who have given their lives for the sake of the Jewish homeland. This year, the sirens will carry two dreadful dimensions. For this year we will mourn the over seventy Israelis killed during Operation Cast Lead last summer, as well as the deaths of Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Shaar and Naftali Frenkel, the teenage boys kidnapped and murdered in cold blood for the crime of being Israelis and Jews. The sirens will also remind us of the many sirens that sounded across Israel this year—all the way to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

These two moments of silence represent two diametrically opposite emotions reflected in the tragic episode of the death of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu. After their sudden and tragic passing before the entire nation, "Aaron held his peace." (10:2) At first glance, the silence of Aaron signifies mourning—a stunned quiet of disbelief. Aaron stands silent because he cannot sufficiently express his grief. Yet, silence can represent an entirely different emotion as well. Rabbi Dr. Benny Lau notes that rather than use the normal Hebrew word—*shetikah*—to describe Aaron's silence, the bible describes Aaron's silence as *demamah*—"vayidom Aharon"—"and Aaron held his peace." Elijah, standing in the cave of the Lord, learns that God is not found in the great strong wind, or in the powerful earthquake, or in the fire. "But the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice (*kol demamah dakah*)..." (Kings 1 19:12) According to this understanding, Aaron's silence represents strength, power and determination. Rather than succumb to his emotions and wail in grief, Aaron steels himself in strength.

These are the two silences of Yom Hashoah and Yom Hazikaron. On Yom Hashoah, we stand silent, numb to the sheer magnitude of the tragedy. Even today we emerge from our visit to our local Holocaust Museum or Yad Vashem in Jerusalem stunned and dumbfounded. How could it have happened? How did the world allow it to happen? We have no words—only silence. In contrast, our silence on Yom Hazikaron represents not just sadness but also strength. When officers of the IDF command their charges to stand at attention, they order: "*Amod dom!*"—"Stand Silently!" On Yom Hazikaron, the entire people of Israel stand at attention. We remember, honor and mourn those who have made the greatest possible sacrifice to defend and protect the Jewish state, but we also stand in quiet determination, with the knowledge and fortitude that we must stand tall and strong to defend and protect our people.

We, the citizens of the United States, also stand at attention. We stand ready and willing to come to Israel's aid, through our lobbying efforts, our activism, and our outreach. For the many hundreds of rockets fired at Israel last summer, only two civilians were killed, thanks in great part due to the Iron Dome system, funded by the United States. Our hard work also ensured that Israel had the supplies it needed to carry out Cast Lead, and the international backing it required to root out the terror tunnels dug by Hamas. When the people of Israel stand at attention on Yom Hazikaron, we too will stand with them, ready and willing to take action to protect the safety and security of the Jewish state. ■

Welcoming Review

It was well-pleasing in his sight (Leviticus 10:20)

וייטב בעיניו (ויקרא י:כ)

Recently, Senator Charles Schumer of New York expressed strong support for the proposed Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 authored by Senators Bob Corker (R-TN) and Robert Menendez (D-NJ), which would give Congress sixty days to approve a deal with Iran before any economic sanctions could be lifted [saying that](#), “I strongly believe Congress should have the right to disapprove any agreement and I support the Corker bill which would allow that to occur.” Opponents of the bill have argued that as the agreement with Iran will be reached by the executive branch, like many foreign policy agreements, the President should not need congressional approval. As we see from our parashah, Moses would not have agreed.

Following the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron and his remaining sons were still commanded to eat from the sacrifices offered as part of the consecration of the Tabernacle. When Moses discovered that one of the sacrifices wasn't consumed, he “was angry with Eleazar and with Ithamar, the sons of Aaron that were left...” (verse 16) Yet, when Moses heard Aaron's explanation for their actions, “it was well-pleasing in his sight.” (verse 20) The Talmud explains that the exact nature of their dispute revolved around intricate nuances in the ritual laws of sacrifices. (Zevachim 101) Yet, despite the fact that Moses was clearly the greatest expert in ritual law at the time, he yielded to Aaron's argument accepting his point of view on a complicated legal matter. Moreover, the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 13:1) notes that Moses went much farther, as “he issued an announcement to the entire camp saying, ‘I have erred and my brother Aaron came and taught me.’” Instead of insisting that only he could decide on intricate, complicated matters, Moses both welcomed and accepted a differing opinion.

In a similar fashion, the President should welcome and encourage Congress to take an active role in the final agreement with Iran. An agreement with such profound national security implications as this one, must be subjected to the constitutional system of checks and balances that is the bedrock of our democracy. To that end, we must continue to [urge our Senators to support the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act](#). ■

A Diet of Hate

They shall not be eaten (Leviticus 11:13)

לא יאכלו (ויקרא יא:יג)

This week's parasha includes a long list of animals acceptable and unacceptable for Jews to consume. Regarding the consummation of forbidden birds we read that, “they shall not be eaten.” (verse 13) Rashi explains that the passive voice, “be eaten,” means that it is also prohibited to feed these forbidden animals to children, even though they are too young to be obligated to follow halakhah. We recognize that exposing our children to sinful behavior as children will undoubtedly affect them when they reach adulthood. This rule applies not only to food, but to spiritual sustenance as well. We invest a great deal of effort and energy to teach our children to walk on the proper path of Jewish life so that they will continue to adhere to our tradition as adults.

Unfortunately, instead of Palestinians feeding their children a spiritual diet of peace and coexistence, they have been actively educating Palestinian children towards hatred and violence against Israelis and Jews. A [recent exhibition in Jerusalem](#) of the Hamas Student Association of the An-Najah University in Nablus, as part of its “Jerusalem Week,” represents just the latest example of this phenomenon. Rather than focus on the beauty and richness of Jerusalem, the exhibition, attended by hundreds of students and faculty, glorified terror attacks against Israelis. We cannot be surprised when individuals, raised in an “atmosphere of incitement to violence,” then follow this diet of hatred with [acts of terror and attempted murder](#). If the Palestinian Authority truly desires peace, it must first and foremost root out the hatred and violence that seems to be a basic food group found in the spiritual diet of every Palestinian child. ■

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