



# Sermon Tidbits

SEPTEMBER 12, 2016

## Parashat Ki Teitzei

### We May Not Hide Ourselves

You may not hide yourself (Deuteronomy 22:3)

לא תוכל להתעלם (דברים כב:ג)

This week, Navonel Glick, Chief Operating Officer of the Israeli international aid group IsraAID, will receive the [Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Award](#) for 2016 from the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, “for his work to provide relief in areas of crisis throughout the world,” the Times of Israel [reported](#). The center will honor Glick along with five other role models who are, “transforming communities and bringing about positive change in the world.” According to [Ynet](#), “IsraAID has become synonymous with a rapid response to humanitarian crises since its inception in 2001. Its medical teams, search and rescue units, post trauma experts, community specialists and other professionals have led international responses in natural disasters and civil strife around the world.” Importantly, the critical work of IsraAID reflects a fundamental Jewish value conveyed by Moses in our parshah.

Describing the obligation to return a lost item, Moses explains that not only is there a positive commandment of *hashavat aveidah*, but there is also a negative commandment if one should fail to fulfill the mitzvah. “You shall not see your brother’s ox or his sheep driven away and hide thyself from them; you shall surely bring them back to your brother...you may not hide yourself.” (22:1-3) Maimonides writes that, “If one leaves the wayfarer in panic without either unloading or reloading, one has negated the observance of a positive commandment and violated a negative commandment...” (*Laws of Murder and Guarding Life*, 13:2) Yet, formulation of the prohibition against hiding oneself from assisting others conveys a critical moral message as well. The three words, *lo tuchal l’hitalem* can be translated in two ways. While we conventionally translate the phrase as a commandment, meaning that one “may not” hide from another person’s suffering, the phrase can also be read as a statement of fact: “You cannot hide yourself.” By formulating the commandment in this way, Moses conveys a critical truth: While a person certainly can physically hide his eyes and pretend not to see a person in need or distress, if we strive to be people of kindness and friendship we cannot morally look away from the suffering of others. We cannot pretend not to see and refuse to help. Rather, we must surely rise to act and alleviate the loss and suffering of others.

This ideology represents the underlying value guiding organizations like IsraAID. Last month, the organization sent a delegation of aid workers to assist the people affected by the flooding in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. According to [Ynet](#), the team “helped Louisiana residents return to their homes to collect personal effects, and helped begin the process of rehabilitating flooded out homes so that the Louisianans’ lives affected by the flooding [could] go back to normal.” Days later IsraAID’s was the first foreign aid organization on the ground in Italy to help survivors of a major earthquake, which claimed 290 lives and reduced entire towns to rubble. The Times of Israel [reported](#) that, “Israeli volunteers [were] dispatched to quake-struck Italy to help the country recover from last week’s devastating natural disaster, including building temporary shelters for hundreds of families left homeless by the temblor.” Among the volunteers, psychologist Silvana Winer, a native Italian-speaker, also [offered psychological trauma care](#) both to the victims of the quake as well as to aid workers searching for survivors.

Over the past decade, IsraAID has responded to natural disasters in over 35 countries, distributing over 1,000 tons of relief to over 1 million people. Beginning in September 2015, IsraAID deployed to Greece to help Greek authorities cope with the influx of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Somewhat surprisingly, according to [Israel21c.org](#), when told those assisting them are Israeli, the refugees often respond, “Oh, we love Israel!” Through its incredible humanitarian work, IsraAID volunteers represent the Jewish ideal that when people are in distress, we cannot look away. ■

## Keeping Commitments

That which is gone out of your lips... (Deuteronomy 23:24)

מוצא שפתיך (דברים כג:כד)

In biblical times, the taking of an oath usually involved a commitment to bring a voluntary offering in the Temple. An oath can represent more mundane commitments as well: one can take an oath to turn off our cellphone during dinner each night for a year or an oath to attend synagogue regularly thus transforming a positive intention into a spiritual obligation. Yet, while taking an oath presents an opportunity for growth and improvement, it also carries a warning: “When you shall vow a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it...That which is gone out of your lips you shall observe and do...” (Deuteronomy 23:22-24) We are not obligated by any means to take oaths. However, if we do take an oath, we must take great care to keep our word and fulfill our commitment. Rabbi Aaron Lichtenstein [notes](#) that the very existence of oaths presents a spiritual challenge: on one hand, the ability to accept greater restrictions and stringencies can be an opportunity for spiritual growth. At the same time, if one fails to live up to a commitment it would have been better to have never taken the oath at all. “What is the proper path?” Rabbi Lichtenstein wondered. “Is it incumbent upon a person to take an oath and accept upon himself greater obligations, or perhaps it is better not to endanger oneself, but instead remain at one’s current spiritual level?” He explains that while one should always aspire to personal and spiritual growth, “He must establish goals and achieve them. Nevertheless, he must know that this must be done in proper measure, such that he can fulfill that which he accepted upon himself and not more. For if he sets for himself lofty goals that he cannot achieve and fulfill, there is, in the failure to fulfill those goals, great danger.”

During the month of Elul, as we prepare for the coming High Holidays, hearing the sound of the shofar each morning, we too confront this challenge. We wish to set goals for ourselves for improvement and emerge from Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur as different, improved individuals. Yet, we must also take care to set reasonable, realistic goals that we can indeed achieve, so that our spiritual journey ends not in failure, but in success.

In its bid to convince the international community to remove the biting economic sanctions that were crippling its economy, Iran also made commitments to the world. It committed through the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), agreed to with the United States and other world powers, to significantly and verifiably curtail its nuclear program, in order to give the world concrete assurance that the Islamic Republic was not engaged in nuclear weapons research. This carefully crafted agreement established specific, concrete criteria that had to be met for the international community to roll back economic sanctions. Disturbingly, a recent report released last week by the Washington-based [Institute for Science and International Security](#) indicated that, “The United States and its negotiating partners agreed ‘in secret’ to allow Iran to evade some restrictions in last year’s landmark nuclear agreement in order to meet the deadline for it to start getting relief from economic sanctions,” [Reuters reported](#). Among the exemptions outlined in the report were two that allowed Iran to exceed the deal’s limits on how much low-enriched uranium (LEU) it can keep in its nuclear facilities. LEU can be purified into highly enriched, weapons-grade uranium.

Given Iran’s continued evasion of its international commitments, including through illicit ballistic missile tests and arms transfers prohibited by U.N. Security Council resolutions, these concessions, if the reports are accurate, set a dangerous precedent and encourage Iran to further shirk its international obligations.

Rather than seeking ways to ease enforcement on the nuclear agreement, the United States must exercise robust oversight of Iran’s behavior and respond to violations of the JCPOA, U.S. law or United Nations Security Council Resolutions with certain, swift and severe penalties. Instead of rewarding Iran for its continued aggressive, dangerous behavior, we should only ease economic sanctions when we know with certainty that Iran is keeping its commitments to the world. ■

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