

MAY 1, 2017

Parashat Achrei Mot-Kedoshim

Fighting Falsehoods with Truth

Nor lie one to another (Leviticus 19:11)

ולא תשקרו איש בעמיתו (ויקרא ט:יא)

Last October the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) passed a resolution called “[The Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls](#),” which aimed to undermine the historic Jewish ties to the Old City of Jerusalem, alter Jerusalem’s history and erase Jewish links to our ancient capital. Leading up to this week’s meeting, UNESCO member nations (both the United States and Israel suspended their funding to UNESCO in 2011 and thus do not vote in the organization) yet again submitted an anti-Israel resolution for discussion. This resolution “includes clauses denying any Jewish connection to the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem,” the [Times of Israel reported](#). Thankfully, the Trump Administration marshalled the United States’ diplomatic corps significant heft in an attempt to defeat this counterproductive resolution. Yet, the repeated introduction of not only anti-Israel, but unhistorical and inaccurate resolutions raises a challenging question: How do you combat an ongoing campaign of falsehoods? We can find an answer to this conundrum lies in a verse in our parashah.

Parashat Kedoshim includes a number of mitzvot critical to the proper functioning not only of a religious community, but of society in general. Among them we learn that, “You shall not steal; neither shall you deal falsely nor lie one to another.” (19:11) Which sin is worse: to steal or to lie? Rabbi Benzion Mutzafi in his work *Doresh Tzion* (vol. 3 p. 318) quotes Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra who notes that lying represents the more egregious behavior, as a thief usually steals at night (and rests during the day) or visa-versa, while the liar lies around the clock. In addition, a thief usually steals from an individual, while a liar attempts to deceive the public at large. How should a person who has fallen into the trap of a liar respond? Rabbi Mutzafi writes, “It would seem that this person should permit himself to lie in return, as a payback for the falsehoods perpetrated upon him. But here the Torah warns us, ‘nor [shall they] lie one to another’. [The phrase] ‘to one another’ teaches us that one should not lie even in response. Even if the prevaricator who lied to your face stands against you, it is forbidden to express words of falsehood!” In other words, we do not—and may not—fight lies with more lies. The best, most effective and only way to fight falsehoods is with the truth.

This principle—fighting falsehood with truth—must also be our guiding value in the ongoing campaign of falsehood about the Jewish nature of our treasured holy sites in Jerusalem and across the Land of Israel. While others spread lies about the nature of Israel, we must be vigilant in loudly speaking the truth about our deep historic connection with the land. Moreover, we must consistently remind the world about the constant discoveries of new evidence demonstrating this truth. Earlier this year in February researchers announced the discovery of a new cave in Israel that they say once housed Dead Sea Scrolls—the 12th such cave found to date. Last October, the Israel Antiquities Authority [uncovered](#) an ancient papyrus from the First Temple period that has the earliest Hebrew reference to Jerusalem, apart from the Bible. While the document was a simple [bill of sale for wine](#), it demonstrates a living, vibrant Jewish community both in and around Jerusalem during Biblical times. Around that same time, archaeologists revealed that they had discovered relics on the Temple Mount dating to the First Temple period, including pottery fragments and animal bones—the first time archaeologists had discovered artifacts from the First Temple on the Temple Mount itself. In the Galilee, scientists [discovered](#) in September 2016 hundreds of limestone caves from 2,000 years ago into which Jewish villagers burrowed during the Great Jewish Revolt (66-73 CE). While hiding from the Roman troops, the inhabitants made extensive embellishments to the caves, including water cisterns, ritual baths and candle niches carved into the rock, indicating they lived there for extended periods of time.

Israel's detractors and international organizations like UNESCO continue to deny the Jewish connection to Jerusalem, but these ancient dwellings and artifacts provide the latest evidence in support of historical and biblical truth. The reconstructed floor tiles from the Second Temple; synagogues and caves in the Galilee and Jerusalem; and ancient scrolls that mention Jerusalem and contain Hebrew prayer all tell a different story: The history, culture and religion of the Jewish people are inextricably tied to the Land of Israel, especially Jerusalem. And, the best and most effective way to counter these lies is by promoting the only thing that matters: the truth. ■

Marking the Graves

Nor put a stumbling-block before the blind (Leviticus 19:14) (ולפני עור לא תתן מכשול (ויקרא יט:יד))

When the news of the horrific chemical weapons attack in Syria broke, nations around the world, including Israel, reacted strongly. After a suspected chemical killed at least 58 people, including 11 children, in the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib, [Haaretz reported](#) that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu severely condemned the chemical weapons attack against innocent civilians in Syria saying, "The horrible images in Syria should shock any human." Israel Interior Minister Arye Deri went even farther, [tweeting that](#) Israel must intervene in the situation in Syria. "A heartbreaking horror in Syria this morning, with dozens of children killed by chemical weapons. As a power and the sole democracy in the region, Israel must lead the world in putting an end to this horrible massacre." While Israel did not act militarily, the United States did, fulfilling an important dictate in our parashah.

The Sages never understood the prohibition against putting a "stumbling block before the blind" in only a literal sense. Rather, Dr. Hershey H. Friedman [writes](#), "the word 'blind' is interpreted metaphorically to represent any person or group that is unaware, unsuspecting, ignorant, or morally blind, and individuals are prohibited from taking advantage of them or tempting them to do wrong." Among the different examples of this prohibition are the selling of wine to a Nazarite who is forbidden from drinking it, or the offering of misleading advice. The Talmud (*Moed Katan* 5a) adds another seemingly strange example: "Where does the Torah allude to the duty of marking graves?...Said Abaye: You shall not put a stumbling block before the blind." Professor Nechama Lebovitz (see *New Studies in Vayikra* p. 311) notes that in this example the offender who knows of a grave and does not mark it is entirely passive. She asks, "How can this constitute putting a stumbling block before the blind? He has neither deceived nor provoked nor misled anyone?" Due to her compelling question, Leibovitch dramatically expands the scope of this prohibition. "The Torah teaches us that even by sitting at home doing nothing, by complete passivity and divorcement from society, one cannot shake off responsibility for what is transpiring in the world at large, for the iniquity, violence and evil there. By not protesting, 'not marking the graves' and danger spots, you have become responsible for any harm arising therefrom, and have violated the prohibition: 'You shall not put a stumbling block before the blind...'"

Passivity in the face of iniquity, violence and evil is a transgression that the Torah does not abide. We cannot simply stand by when a madman uses chemical weapons to murder innocent civilians, no matter where it happens in the world. It is for this reason that Israeli officials issued strong statements of support for the American Tomahawk missiles that were fired from the Mediterranean Sea at Syria's al-Shayrat airfield in response to the chemical attack. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [said that](#), "In words and actions President Trump sent a strong and clear response: The use of chemical weapons is unacceptable." Israeli President Reuven Rivlin added that, "In acting as it has, the United States serves as an example to the entire free world, which must support any step required to bring the atrocities in Syria to an end." Israelis also did more than just issue statements. It is well known that Israel [has quietly provided medical treatment](#) to thousands of Syrians wounded in the conflict. In addition, the Jewish Week [reported](#) that in the wake of the attack, "Israelis have donated hundreds of thousands of shekels to help children and others caught in the conflict." By joining together to rebuff the horrific act of a brutal and vicious dictator, the people of Israel and the United States have emphatically demonstrated that they will take the responsibility of "marking the graves" seriously, the with the goal of minimizing the need for more Syrian graves in the future. ■

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