

APRIL 23, 2018

Parashat Acharei Mot - Kedoshim

Do Not Stand Idly By

You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor (Leviticus 19:16)

לא תעמד על דם רעך (ויקרא יט:טז)

This past week the United States, the United Kingdom and France fired more than 100 missiles on a Syrian chemical weapons manufacturing and research facilities in response to a poison gas attack that killed dozens of people. This was the biggest intervention by Western powers against President Assad. Prime Minister Netanyahu [lauded](#) the U.S. commitment as “not limited to proclamations and principles” and thanked President Trump for his resolve and said that Israel’s support remains unchanged. Netanyahu also directed comments to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, saying, “It should be clear to President Assad that his reckless efforts to acquire and use weapons of mass destruction, his wanton disregard for international law and his provision of a forward base for Iran and its proxies endanger Syria.” [Israel](#), following an alleged attack of its own, is now girding itself for a response from Iran after the recent escalation in the North. Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman stressed military preparedness and security will need to be bolstered. “We are facing a new reality—the Lebanese army, in cooperation with Hezbollah, the Syrian army, the Shiite militias in Syria and above them Iran—are all becoming a single front against the State of Israel,” Lieberman cautioned.

According to most systems of law there is no legal obligation to rescue a person in danger. Jewish law however, dictates a different approach. The duty to act to save a life comes from this week’s Torah portion: “Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:16). The Talmud (*Sanhedrin 73a*) comments on this verse, saying: “From which verse in the Torah do we know that if an individual sees another person drowning, mauled by beasts, or attacked by robbers, he/she is bound to save that person? From the verse, ‘You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.’” The Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel interprets this ancient verse to highlight its contemporary global implications: “*Lo ta’amod al dam re’eacha* is a biblical commandment. The word that is used in the verse is not *achi’cha*, thy Jewish brother, but *re’eacha*, thy fellow human being, be he or she Jewish or not. All are entitled to live with dignity and hope and all are entitled to live without fear and pain. In a word, the mitzvah of ‘*Lo Taamod*’, teaches that we are commanded to actively intervene to aid anyone who is suffering.”

The latest response from the U.S. represents this ideal. The U.S. has come to the defense of innocent Syrians and has come to support its ally Israel ensuring that Israel can defend itself against this growing [Iranian threat](#). Iran has deployed as many as 2,000 of its own Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) troops in Syria, which provides supplies, training, and direction to tens of thousands of Syrian forces, Hezbollah terrorists, and Shia militiamen drawn from Iraq, the Gulf, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some of these forces operate on Israel’s northern border, bringing Iran’s malign influence directly to Israel’s doorstep. Iran has used its support for the Assad regime to establish a “land bridge” from Iran to the Mediterranean Sea—via Syria, Iraq and Lebanon—enabling the ground transport of weapons and fighters to Iran’s terrorist proxies on Israel’s border.

The U.S. House of Representatives is currently considering the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Economic Exclusion Act would help push back against this terrorist organization. This bill, [HR 5132](#), would tighten sanctions on the IRGC. As pro-Israel Americans, it is incumbent upon us to encourage our members of Congress to co-sponsor this legislation.

We are grateful for America’s strong support of Israel throughout this challenging time. We must continue our efforts to ensure that the United States stands by Israel and supports its right to defend against Iranian threats on its border, and continues to ensure that Israel has the resources required to defend itself, by itself, against threats—or any combination of threats in the future. ■

Standing Up to Injustice

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

הוכיח תוכיח את עמית (ויקרא יט:יז)

Israel continues to defend itself from Hamas made tunnels that present imminent danger to the civilians of the Jewish state. This past week, the IDF exposed and neutralized a Hamas terror tunnel encroaching into Israeli territory in the Shaar Hanegev Regional Council. This tunnel was described by the army as being “long and of high quality.” The IDF [reported](#) that the tunnel, which connected to a chain of other tunnels, was neutralized by filling it with cement and was the eighth tunnel destroyed in the past few months. The tunnel was discovered just meters away from the border fence, where mass protests have been taking place over the past several weeks. In a post to his Twitter feed, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman lauded the destruction of the tunnel and warned Palestinians in Gaza that Hamas was wasting their aid money on pointless tunneling operations.

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 the entire world.” This idea is gleaned from a verse in this week’s portion: “You shall surely rebuke your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:17). The Torah exhorts us to give voice when seeing immorality and injustice. The book of Deuteronomy opens with “These are the words that Moses spoke to all of Israel.” (Deuteronomy 1:1) Rashi comments on this verse, citing the Midrash, notes that Moses was saying words of reproach, hinting to all those present the many times that they had transgressed before the Almighty. Moses did not shirk from his responsibility to reprove those that had acted inappropriately. His admonition came from a genuine sense of what is right and what is just—and to see to it that change be made. Furthermore, Maimonides in his magnum opus, the *Mishneh Torah*, codifies the mitzvah to reprove wrongdoers as one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah.

This Torah teaching sheds a light on the courageous positions that the U.S. takes as it strives to serve as a moral compass to the world. In the latest aggression in Gaza, the United States has been a voice of rebuke and condemnation regarding the nefarious conduct of Hamas. Hamas, a designated terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, poses an immediate, ongoing threat to Israel and its citizens. The group according to all accounts is constructing an enormous infrastructure with which to attack Israeli communities, including a broad network of terror tunnels with funds diverted from international humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians. At the same time, almost 7 million Israelis are now within range of an estimated 10,000 Hamas rockets. The [United States](#) has long defined Israel’s survival and security as important to its national interests. When the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) issued a deeply unfair, inaccurate and misleading report on Israel’s self-defense efforts against Hamas, American leaders came to Israel’s defense. When the U.N. Security Council called for an investigation regarding the clashes on the Gaza- Israel border, the United States [blocked](#) that draft. The United State’s powerful and public support for Israel at the U.N. and other forums in recent months is a prime example of the kind of leadership and commitment to truth and morality that the Jewish tradition honors and applauds.

Helping to ensure stability in Israel is not only important for the Jewish people, but it is critically important for the United States as well. In an increasingly uncertain Middle East, Israel is the only stable democratic ally upon which America can consistently depend. When we work to strengthen cooperation between our two countries in areas such as intelligence, homeland security, and counterterrorism, we’re not only helping Israel, but we are also helping the United States meet its security challenges. ■

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