

"Reflections on AIPAC & Vayikra...It's all about sacrifices!

March 8, 2013; 6 Adar II 5774

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I learned about the meaning of sacrifices from an aboriginal, tribal Alaskan woman. Sari and I were hiking in Denali National Park, and beneath the enormous shadow of Mt. McKinley, which the native population refers to as "Denali," we listened to an Inuit woman describe in precise detail how when a moose is hunted and trapped, every last morsel of that moose is used for something. A good size moose can yield around 500 lbs of meat and fat; entire wardrobes could be made out of moose hides—everything from mufflers to moccasins; antlers can be used as tools, tableware, and net sinkers for fishing; bones are ground up and boiled to make a thick, heavy broth; moose hair mixed with feathers is used for pillows and stuffed in mattresses; sinews and muscles are used as threads and heavy twines for sewing and tying; even the membrane surrounding the heart can be dried and used as for storage bags! And in case you still have an appetite, she described a particular favorite among the natives: Moose head soup. You can thank me later for sparing you the details! She also described how along with the salvaging and repurposing of every conceivable part of the moose, that the native cultures demonstrate a profound honor and respect for the animal. The act of eating a moose was a spiritual as well as gastronomical event, and the soul of the animal is revered by everyone who partakes of the animal. It is said that those who share the meat with others will be granted good fortune by the powers of nature.

The Mishnah says that the definition of a wise person is the ability to learn from all people...*ha'lomeid mikol adam*. And as I listened to this vivid description of indigenous Alaskan moose consumption I realized that this Alaskan woman was teaching me some really important Torah. I never really understood why nearly every English translation of *korbanot* is rendered as "sacrifices." The *korban*, which is the feature of so much of Leviticus, is an offering of an animal, a bird, or at times grain on the altar for a variety of reasons: celebration, thanksgiving, atonement, the acknowledgement of sacred times or festivals. It makes sense to translate those items on the altar as gifts, or offerings, or ransoms, or redemptions. The word *korban*, however, derives from the Hebrew word that means 'to approach' or 'to come close'—so maybe the *korbanot* should be called offerings of attachment or nearness or proximity...But *sacrifices*? My Alaskan guide clarified it for me. Just as a moose represented incalculable value to this woman and her clan, the animals of Leviticus were extraordinarily precious to their owners. To part with a lamb, for example, was to part with all those many uses—food, milk, hides, you name it. It was very much a **sacrifice** to relinquish all that value as an expression of faith in God. **The act of sacrifice is giving up something you want, something you need, ostensibly in return for something at least as good if not better.** In the Torah, that something better is achieving closeness with God; or the assurance of forgiveness. It was clear that if you wanted those things, there was a specific ritual of sacrifice, of giving up something of value in exchange for them. The reason that sacrifice is actually such

an appropriate, if not altogether accurate translation of this concept, is that it absolutely involves giving up something valuable, beneficial, nourishing, sustaining, in exchange for something of even greater significance.

The dilemma that every ancient ancestor of ours faced—*Should I part with this animal, this grain, this source of sustenance and livelihood, and present it as a sacrifice on the altar?* is the same dilemma that our modern day brothers and sisters in Israel confront today. Except the sacrifice is one of national dimensions! Should we put more land on the *mizbei'ah*, on the holy altar of negotiations? Will we in fact be rewarded with something even greater than land...the greatest reward of all being the ability to live in peace with Israel's neighbors; to be able to go to work and school and not have to fear a rocket attack or an act of terror. Should Israel place on the altar of geopolitical maneuverings its very existence, as Western nations attempt to unravel Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons? **Think about this in terms of the sacrifices we just read about in Vayikra!** If the premise of sacrifice is to give up something of value in order to get something even better in return, Israel must question whether such sacrifices will really yield a glimmer of peace, or bring about even more aggression and perhaps war.

Keep this sacrificial motif in mind as I describe two scenarios that I have been wrestling with all week. When we look at the world today, there is no more belligerent, no more antagonistic regime than the one in Iran. The so called 'charm offensive' of Iranian President Rohani was revealed for the farce that it is this week when a ship was intercepted by Israeli commandos in the Red Sea carrying a cache of warheads to Gaza. The ship was loaded at the Iranian city of Bandar Abbas, a major port on the Strait of Hormuz under the nose of Iran's largest naval base, and carried its shipment of 375-lb warheads that have a 125-mile striking range destined for Hamas militants. Those weapons would have put Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in striking range, as well as Israel's off-shore natural gas fields. And lest there be any question of where these weapons came from, they were conveniently stamped with the words "**Made in Iran!**"^[1] So at the same time as Iran is trying to persuade the world that it is not a rogue state; that it does not support terror; that its nuclear program is entirely for peaceful purposes, they are caught red handed, exporting weapons to terrorists! Perhaps you can understand why 60% of Israelis believe that the current negotiations of the P5+1 endanger Israel.^[2] Perhaps now you can understand why 1 in 4 Israelis say they would consider leaving the country...moving elsewhere...relocating if Iran obtains the bomb...and why 85% of Israelis are afraid of the prospect of that happening.^[3] Can you imagine the economic impact of 1 in 4 Israelis leaving the country? What becomes of the very meaning of Zionism if Israelis no longer feel secure in the Jewish homeland? The whole reason Herzl embarked on this crazy dream of a Jewish State in our ancestral homeland was to provide a haven for Jews in very precarious circumstances. It would be a deathblow to the Zionist dream for Jews to be forced to seek refuge elsewhere.

^[1] Wall Street Journal 3/6/14, page A11

^[2] Jerusalem Post, 12/10/13

^[3] UPI, 5/22/09

You know Hilary Clinton got herself in some trouble this week when she compared the aggression of Vladimir Putin to that of Hitler. There isn't a lot of tolerance in the world today for comparing Nazism or the Holocaust to anything else. But I want you to remember that the word Holocaust is a Greek work. *Holos* means whole, *kaustos* means burnt. And it is a term that initially referred to sacrificial offerings that were burnt whole on altars to Greek gods. If anything today approximates the threat of another holocaust, if there is any justifiable comparison to the Holocaust of the 20th Century, it is not Putin, it is the mullahs of Iran. Ayatollah Khamenei said just months ago: "Zionist officials cannot be called humans, **they are like animals...**"^[4] Animals, as we read this morning, often found themselves burned whole as sacrificial offerings. Can you put yourselves in the shoes of an Israeli who hears this kind of scathing rhetoric...would you believe that regime is interested in peace? Would you trust that their nuclear program is non-violent? Or would you feel more like sheep being led to the slaughter?

On the Israel-Palestinian front, the question also revolves around sacrifice. The overarching question is whether Israel should cede more precious land in exchange for verbal commitments of recognition of the Jewish state and that a new Palestinian state will be a peaceful neighbor? 70% of Israelis believe in a two state solution, with Israel and a Palestinian state existing side by side. By the way, in case you wondered about my politics, I also believe that lasting peace must involve the negotiated creation of a sovereign Palestinian state alongside the Jewish state of Israel. Although 70% of Israelis agree with that, *70% of Israelis also don't think such a solution is possible!* Why is there such mistrust? Consider this...Just a few months ago 26 Palestinian prisoners were released from Israeli jails in order to jump start negotiations. It was an anguished decision for Israel to free Palestinian criminals who were convicted of killing innocent civilians and sentenced for their crimes. Yet Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority President welcomed them to his headquarters in Ramallah literally on a red carpet. They laid ceremonial wreaths at Yasser Arafat's grave and were celebrated in the streets and by Abbas as heroes and freedom fighters.^[5] These are people who perpetrated heinous attacks; who killed and maimed. And Israelis sit in their living rooms and watch this on television and wonder, Is there really a partner on the other side of the Green Line? Are people who rejoice and celebrate the killers of women and children really capable of making peace? I had the honor of representing the Mid-Atlantic Region of AIPAC at a special luncheon for the 500 Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox rabbis in attendance at AIPAC. At that lunch I was seated with His Excellency, Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, Ron Prozor. He is an articulate, eloquent, brilliant diplomat if there ever was one. Prozor described how the Palestinians work tirelessly to block anything and everything that comes up at the United Nations that has anything to do with Israel...Even initiatives like water desalination or agricultural and irrigation programs in Africa. Prozor spoke about an Israeli sponsored resolution for entrepreneurship to meet the challenges of poverty in the developing world. The Palestinian delegation lobbied against that too! Anything that Israel touches, whether it relates to the Palestinians and

^[4] Jerusalem Post, 11/20/13

^[5] Times of Israel, 12/31/13

frequently when it does not, is virulently opposed by them. So it's no wonder why Israelis are highly skeptical of the prospects of peace or the creation of a Palestinian state that will be a peaceful neighbor on its border.

I joined a spirited delegation from Har Shalom this week to the annual Policy Conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. A colleague of mine at the conference quipped about AIPAC, "You know the joke about 2 Jews 3 opinions; Well here it's 14,000 Jews and one opinion!" What is that one opinion? That the US-Israel relationship is vital to both American and Israeli interests. It is incredibly powerful to be in a room with 14,000 other people who have come together to express their commitment to the bond between our two nations. Sari called it "Facebook-live!" Because with every few steps you're bound to run into someone you know from some other part of your life. Contrary to all the myths and slanders of AIPAC, it is as bipartisan as ever. I listened intently both to John Kerry and to John McCain. Isaiah Cummings was on the dais as was Eric Cantor. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew spoke, as did Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. Jerrold Nadler and Susan Brooks; Chuck Schumer and Rudy Boschwitz; Donna Brazile and Ralph Reed; Bibi Netanyahu spoke, as did Opposition Leader Buji Herzog; Naftali Bennet and Tzippi Livni. Ari Shavit spoke as did Danny Gordis. There were Christian representatives, Latinos, African Americans, Young Professionals, High School and College students, a gathering for Gay and Lesbian Israel supporters, and the list goes on and on. I am consistently amazed and inspired by the magnitude and diversity of Israel supporters AIPAC is able to convene. Yet with Parashat Vayikra as the backdrop, I felt perhaps more than anything the significance of the sacrifices Israel is again being asked to make by the international community. And like our ancestors who brought their cherished animals to the ancient altar in the hopes of changing their destiny, I believe that Israel will, in the end, make some pretty steep sacrifices for peace. I believe they will do so, as they have so many times in the past, because the crisis with the Palestinians is agonizing and intolerable, and because Iran not only threatens Israel, but threatens the whole region. Most of all, I believe that Israel will make these sacrifices because it knows that the United States unswervingly backs Israel's safety and security. I am grateful to AIPAC for cultivating that support, and I pray every day as you do for the welfare of the state of Israel and for the people of Israel. As the Psalmist says: *Sha'alu sh'lom Yerushalayim, yishlayu ohaveiha*. Pray for the well-being of Jerusalem; May those who love you be at peace. *Yehi shalom be'heilekh shalva be'armonotayikh*. May there be well-being within your ramparts, peace in your citadels.^[6] And let us say: Amen

Remarks by Rachel Mayl, Senior, Richard Montgomery High School & First Time AIPAC Attendee

Shabbat Shalom!

When I first decided to attend AIPAC Policy Conference, I had one goal in mind. I wanted to learn how to be a pro-Israel advocate for when I go to college this fall. As a Jew I know, and have always known, that I

^[6] Psalm 122:6-7

love the state of Israel. But I realized I wanted, and I need, to be able to articulate the reasons not just why I love Israel, but why its existence is vital. And that is exactly what I got Policy Conference.

With discussions on everything from Israel as a strategic American asset all the way social media's growing influence on Generation Y's ideology in the Middle East I was more and more blown away with every new breakout session I attended.

As I sat in a crowd 14,000 Policy Conference attendees in the huge plenary sessions, that excitement didn't fade. I heard from Representatives Elijah Cummings, Eric Cantor, Steny Hoyer, Senators Charles Schumer and John McCain, not to mention Secretary of State John Kerry and Prime Minister Netanyahu, as well as many more incredibly accomplished politicians, doctors, activists, and businessmen and women. With each new speech my knowledge deepened, my passion was sparked and my appreciation for the state of Israel grew exponentially.

The Rabbi asked me to share with you all one take-away from my experience at AIPAC Policy Conference. That's just not possible. The breadth of topics discussed was unbelievable. The people in attendance, people of every age, race, and denomination, were some of the most passionate, intelligent, and dedicated I have ever met. And the experience was unparalleled.

I found what I was looking for at Policy Conference- I learned how to be that advocate I had set out to be. But in the process I gained so much more. I now know Israel for all that it is, much more than a homeland for us, but the groundbreaker of invention, the birthplace of global leaders, the expert in humanitarian aid and first response, and so much more. And I know that with every year I go back there will always be a whole new set of discussions, inventions, and speakers to inspire me all over again.

See you all at Policy Conference 2015! Shabbat Shalom.