

Ultimate Judgment: Thoughts for Parashat Pekudei

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Pekudei

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

“These are the accounts of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were rendered according to the commandment of Moses...” (*Shemot* 28:21).

The Torah refers to the Mishkan as “tabernacle of the testimony.” It also refers to the “tablets of testimony” that are housed in the ark. What exactly is the “testimony” about?

One explanation is that the “testimony” is about us! The Mishkan, ark and tablets of the law all stand in judgment of us. They “testify” whether or not we are living up to the high standards they represent.

The Torah offers a revolutionary teaching for humanity at large: people are responsible for their actions and will have to answer to the Almighty.

The Talmud enlarges this principle: the Heavenly court deals with us by the exact same standards that we use to deal with others (*Sotah* 8b). If we are kind and compassionate, we can expect to be judged by God with kindness and compassion. If we are cruel and unfair to others, we can expect the Heavenly court to deal with us with the same qualities we have shown. Our own deeds “testify” for or against us.

"Midah keNeged Midah"--being judged measure for measure—relates not just to private individuals, but to political leaders and nations who act and speak hypocritically and hatefully. They may appear to be powerful now but they will one day stand before the Heavenly Court. The standards they use to judge others are the same standards that will be used by the Heavenly court to judge them.

Sometimes, people think they can advance themselves politically or economically by engaging in immoral behavior. They may seem to prosper but, in fact, they are condemning themselves to stand before God with blood on their hands. They do not understand that their immorality will come back to haunt them.

During the past months, we have witnessed abuse, malice and violence perpetrated against the State of Israel and against the Jewish People. Various world "leaders" and media figures have maligned Israel in malicious ways. Other world "leaders" and media figures have remained silent, or tepid in their support of Israel. Demagogues have fomented anti-Israel and anti-Semitic hatred; the UN has played its traditional role as the world's foremost agency for promoting anti-Semitism.

We must remind the world that there is a God, that there is ultimate justice, that evil does not and cannot prevail. We can remind the world that those who demonstrate injustice, cruelty, and moral depravity in their attacks on Israel will be judged by the Heavenly court with these very same standards of harshness.

Although we fully believe in the ultimate justice of the Heavenly court, this doesn't solve our problems here and now. What is our response to this wave of hatred, hypocrisy, and violence against Israel and the Jewish People? Here are some suggestions.

First, we need to pray, to turn to the Almighty for strength and guidance, to draw on our spiritual resources. We need to come together as a community.

We also need to be alert to the dangers, to be articulate spokespeople for the House of Israel, to let our elected officials know that we want loud and clear support of Israel, and loud and clear condemnation of those who threaten the

very existence of Israel.

We need to let Israel know that we genuinely care, and that our fate is inextricably bound with the destiny of Israel. We need to travel to Israel, to invest in Israeli companies, to buy Israel bonds, to contribute to UJA and to important institutions in Israel. We need to buy Israeli products. We need to support those agencies that fight on behalf of Israel and on behalf of the Jewish People.

We need to do our best to demand justice and righteousness, to promote love and harmony among humanity, to fight against the forces of evil that threaten to undermine human civilization.

We need to remind ourselves that the Heavenly court will deal with each of us by the same standards with which we deal with others. Let those standards be the standards of honesty and goodness, fairness and compassion, integrity and strength of character. May God who brings peace in the heavenly spheres bring peace to us, to all Israel, and to all good people everywhere.