

MAY 28, 2007

Parashat B'ha'alotchah

Peace and Forgiveness

V'lo yochlu la'asot hapesach “and could not offer the Passover sacrifice” (Numbers 9:6)

Our *parashah* includes the rules of *pesach sheini*, where those who were impure on the fourteenth of *Nisan* are given a second opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvah*. In Hasidic teachings, the concept of *pesach sheini* has been interpreted as an important source for the concept of *t'shuvah*. The Torah, however, does not allow just anyone to have this second chance; those who simply “skipped out” on the first Passover are not welcome to offer the *pesach sheini*.

Second chances are great things: we can fix what previously went wrong, take advantage of missed opportunities, and even repair broken relationships. As in our *parashah*, however, these chances are not without boundaries. Not everyone gets a second bite at the apple and limitless bites are not offered.

Since Israel's founding, its leaders have made every effort to make peace with their Arab neighbors, and have traded parts of the historic land for peace agreements. Following the Arab League's decision to reaffirm its 2002 “peace initiative” this April there has been much misunderstanding about Israel's quest to make peace with her neighbors.

Unfortunately, the current position of the Arab League is formulated as an ultimatum – a “take it or leave it” format – and not as a genuine invitation to peaceful negotiations. Insisting on the “right of return” of millions of Palestinians not to a Palestinian state, but to Israel, would require Israel to accept the end of its status as a Jewish democracy. Additionally, the authors of the initiative have absolutely failed to condemn Palestinian terrorism, which has been responsible for more than 1,000 Israeli deaths since 2000.

Israel remains committed to pursuing peace with neighboring Arab countries and with the Palestinians. The Jewish state has consistently made difficult choices for peace and demonstrated a level of patience unimaginable from any other country. Our *parashah* offers a *pesach sheini*, but certainly does not call for limitless concessions. The Arab League is getting another bite at the apple. It would be wise to accept negotiation rather than drift into irrelevance while hoping for a *pesach shlishi*. ■

What If

Kuma HaShem v'yafutzu oyvecha “Arise, HaShem, and disperse Your enemies” (Numbers 10:35)

We know this verse from *seder k'riat ha'Torah* in our liturgy. Why would our rabbis choose this verse to announce the opening of the *aron* during our services? According to Rashi, this verse makes a separation between two troubles: *vayisu meihar haShem* two verses earlier and *ha'am k'miton'nim ra* found two verses later. Thus, our *pasuk* literally

divides these two troubles and clears the way for *B'nei Yisrael* to travel – *va'y'hi binso'ah ha'aron*. Similarly, in our services, we ask that enemies be scattered so that we can freely read and study Torah.

Our parashah teaches us that it is difficult to focus on one important thing (study) while worrying about another (self-defense). Certainly, it is not impossible to satisfactorily accomplish both – but it is difficult to achieve our full potential when our attention is divided.

Next month, we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem as a result of the Six-Day War. This promises to be a celebration not just for the Jewish people, but for all peoples who have been free to worship in Jerusalem for the past four decades.

Unfortunately, Israel remains under attack by Syria and the Palestinians. While Egypt and Jordan took advantage of Israel's interest in achieving lasting peace, other neighbors have missed repeated opportunities to settle the conflict through negotiation and agreement. In spite of the conflict, Israel has built a booming economy and is on the cutting edge of medical and technological advancements. This record is truly incredible and forces us to wonder what the Jewish state could accomplish if only her neighbors were interested in true peace.

As we commemorate the victory in the Six-Day War, let us pray that Israel's enemies will finally see the benefit for everyone of seizing the opportunity for peace. ■

Special Relationship

B'chol beiti ne'eman hu “he is trusted throughout My household” (Numbers 12:7)

In our *parashah*'s concluding story, the special relationship between Moshe and HaShem is described as one of trust. According to Ibn Ezra, Moshe unlike any other prophet, could appear before God without being called and could present God with his own requests. In our *pasuk* (and those just before and after) God gives us several examples of how Moshe is unique: God speaks to him face-to-face rather than in a dream, God speaks to him plainly and not *b'chidot*. Why? The only reason we're given is *ne'eman hu*.

We all have special relationships in our lives: with spouses, parents, children, and dear friends. While these relationships may be based on a variety of factors, trust is surely a central ingredient.

Israel has always enjoyed a special relationship of mutual trust with the United States and the U.S. has played an indispensable role in ensuring Israel's survival. The alliance is a natural one between two democracies sharing core values. Recent polls indicate that the relationship enjoys overwhelming support among both countries' citizens.

Since 9/11, the U.S. and Israel have intensified their cooperation in the field of homeland security. Israel provides the U.S. with key intelligence information and American law enforcement agencies study Israel's counter-terror methods for lessons in homeland security that protect all Americans. Israel also provides the U.S. with technological advancements that regularly save the lives of U.S. soldiers. For our part, the U.S. provides the military aid that allows Israel to maintain her qualitative military edge in the Middle East.

As the U.S. and Israel begin negotiating a new foreign aid package, we should remind our elected officials of the mutually beneficial relationship between Israel and the United States. Not only is it a relationship of core values and trust, but one of shared strategic and vital interests. ■