

MAY 21, 2007

Parashat Naso

All Connected

Vi'im ein la'ish go'eil "If the man has no kinsmen" (Numbers 5:8)

Our *parashah* gives us the laws for restitution and repayment when one member of the community steals from another. Torah explains that if the victim is no longer living, repayment must be made to a family member. If the victim is dead and has no living family members then the repayment should be made – along with a sacrifice – to the Temple. According to Rabbah (BT Sanhedrin 68b) the “person who has no kinsmen” must be referring to a convert – for all of Israel is related to each other! Even so, the Torah protects this victim of theft and mandates an extra fine on his behalf. *Kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh.*

Last summer three young Israeli soldiers were taken captive. On June 25th, 2006 Gilad Shalit was seized by Palestinian terrorists, including members of Hamas, who also killed two other I.D.F. soldiers that day. On July 12, Hizballah seized two I.D.F. reservists, Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser, as they patrolled Israel's northern border.

As we near the one year anniversary of the capture of these three young Israelis, we must act to ensure their release. As Hamas is the main party negotiating with Israel over Shalit's release, it is obvious that they are the ones holding him hostage. A few weeks ago, Hamas admitted that a flurry of rockets launched from Gaza was designed as a diversion to allow them to capture more I.D.F. soldiers. They have declared their intention to keep trying.

Hizballah is continuing to rearm at an alarming rate. Explosives and munitions continue to pour in from Syria, as recognized last month by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Hizballah, universally recognized as a proxy of Iranian and Syrian influence, also continues to destabilize the political situation in Lebanon, threatening to topple the fragile government in Beirut.

Rabbah's comment on our *parashah* emphasizes the deep connection between all Jews, wherever they may be. We must work to free Gilad, Ehud, and Eldad by asking our representatives to keep the pressure on Hamas and Hizballah and their terror-supporting masters in Tehran and Damascus. ■

No Refrain

V'chavsah achat... P'chatat "one ewe lamb...for a sin offering" (Numbers 6:14)

In its description of the concluding ritual demanded of the *nazir*, our *parashah* includes a list of *korbanot* that he or she must bring. Oddly a *korban chatat* – a sin offering – is included in the list of the *nazir's* *korbanot*. If the *nazir* utters a vow *l'hazir la'Shem*, what sin has he committed? According to one view in the Talmud, (BT Ta'anit 11a) the

nazir is ordered to bring a sin offering because he has unnecessarily afflicted himself by avoiding wine or grape products which are otherwise permitted.

While demonstrating self-discipline is laudable, the *nazir* is taken to task for missing out on permitted pleasures. There are things in this world from which we should abstain and things we should enjoy.

In 1996, then-Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu came to Washington and proposed an elimination of American economic aid over a period of ten years while asking for an increase in military aid. For Americans, one benefit is that over 75% of military aid is spent right here in the U.S. Netanyahu – and subsequent Israeli leaders – believed that Israel could stand on her own economically, but was still in need of some American help. The ten-year aid package agreed to by Netanyahu and President Clinton – which eliminated economic aid – expired this year and a new agreement is being worked out.

Thankfully, Israel's economy is booming in spite of political and security conditions. As Israel and the United States begin to determine the next aid package, we should remind our elected officials of the benefit to the United States of aid to Israel. In addition to our common values of freedom and democracy, Israel contributes to American technological innovation, intelligence gathering, and homeland security strategies. Joint cooperation with Israel produces products that safeguard Americans and Israelis. Quite simply, our aid dollars are a great investment.

Israel has demonstrated tremendous skill and self-discipline in eliminating the need for U.S. economic aid. Unfortunately, Israel's neighbors make it necessary for the Jewish state to maintain her qualitative military edge in the region. Israel has certainly heeded the lesson of the *nazir* by not over-asking, but also not going without. ■

Sober Measures

Ko tivarachu et B'nei Yisrael “thus shall you bless the people of Israel” (Numbers 6:23)

A *baraita* in *Masechet Ta'anit* addresses the *s'michut parashiyot* in our *sidra* – why does the commandment of the priestly blessing appear immediately following the laws of the *nazir*? According to the *baraita*, this connection teaches us that, just as the *nazir* is forbidden from drinking wine, so must a *kohein* be completely sober when offering the priestly blessing. There is a time for frivolity and a time for clear-headed thinking.

We are all by this point aware of the reckless and wildly anti-Semitic statements made by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the massive effort he is making to gain nuclear capability for his Islamic state. If realized, a nuclear Iran would threaten not only Israel, but US forces in the region, and would place European cities under the umbrella of Iranian missiles.

The international community and a wide array of governmental agencies and organizations in the U.S. have realized the immediate need to stop Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Several state governments are working to divest state pension funds from companies doing business with Iran's energy sector – Florida just became the first state to pass a divestment bill. The United Nations has held firm in its demand that Iran cease plutonium enrichment and, with U.S. leadership, has imposed tough economic sanctions. Both houses of Congress are considering legislation (S. 970 in the Senate and H.R. 1400 in the House) to ratchet up the economic and political pressure on Tehran.

Now is a time for clear-headed action. We should support diplomatic and economic efforts at all levels to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. ■