

JUNE 4, 2007

Parashat Sh'lach L'chah

A Little True

V'gam zavat chalav u'd'vash “Indeed it flows with milk and honey” (Numbers 13:27)

Rashi comments on this verse that every lie that is to be sustained must contain a little bit of truth. As our *parashah* unfolds, we come to learn that the men sent to scout out the land intend to deceive and dishearten *B'nei Yisrael* about the land they have been promised. As they begin their report, they soften their falsehoods with a morsel of truth – that the land is, indeed, exceptional.

We have all heard of the theory of the Big Lie – a lie so colossal that no one could believe that anyone would be so impudent as to make it up. One famous interpretation of the Big Lie has been that if you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. Perhaps the example in our *parashah* is even more sinister because it uses a single or minor fact as a weapon against a larger truth.

Since the beginning of the crisis over Iran's nuclear program, Tehran has insisted that it is merely pursuing a peaceful, civilian nuclear program as is its right under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Even as the United Nations Security Council has passed resolutions finding the Islamic Republic in violation of the Treaty and imposed two sets of sanctions, Iran has continued to insist it has a right to nuclear technology.

Indeed, signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty have a right to civilian nuclear technology. But this right is not absolute and does not exist in a vacuum. Once the Security Council found Iran in violation of its Treaty obligations, such a right no longer existed. Furthermore, the thousands of centrifuges now online at the Natanz reactor go well beyond civilian energy needs and have only one use – the creation of highly-enriched, weapons-grade plutonium.

The world cannot afford to be duped by Iran's campaign of deceit and delay. We should encourage our representatives in Congress to pass H.R. 1400 and S. 970 to tighten sanctions on Tehran and we should support the efforts of organizations working to economically divest from Iran. ■

Spreading Support

Vayitz'u dibat ha'aretz “they spread slander about the land” (Numbers 13:32)

Our scholars argue as to whether or not the sin of slandering *Eretz Yisrael* applies to negative statements about the Land that are true or only to fabricated derogatory information. While there is disagreement about the sinfulness of speaking against Israel, both sides conclude that it is not a good idea.

Like anything in life, there is always a good side and a bad side. Just because we love a person doesn't mean we are blind to his flaws. The question is how we lovingly point out our perceptions without damaging the person we love.

Israel is a democracy. Those who pay her taxes, fight in her army, and live with the consequences of her policies have the ability and the right to make decisions regarding the country's future. While we all love Israel and may have strong opinions about which direction is best, as patriotic Americans and as *ohavei Yisrael* we should also work to ensure that Israel has the firm political backing of the United States.

As Israel faces a bevy of existential threats, she has increasingly come to rely on the friendship and international support of the United States. This friendship has been of tremendous benefit to both countries in concrete ways as well as the moral obligation the U.S. has to a sister democracy. The continued support of the United States for Israel is absolutely vital for the future of both. And our hard work is vital for that support to continue. ■

Navel Exercise

Bamageifah lifnei HaShem “in the plague before HaShem” (Numbers 14:37)

As Moshe explains to *B'nei Yisrael* what has become of the men sent to scout the Land, we note that he uses the specific *bamageifah* rather than the more general *b'mageifah*. In his commentary on this *pasuk*, Rashi describes the plague that consumed them telling us that worms entered their navels. Why does Rashi focus on this part of the body? We learn in Ezekiel 38:12 that *Eretz Yisrael* is the center of the earth. Talmud (BT Sotah 35a) tells us that the spies were destroyed from their navels because they spoke against the navel (center) of the world.

Being at the center of the world spiritually is an obvious blessing for *Eretz Yisrael*. Being at the center of the world's largest political flashpoint, however, is a different story. Israel continues to face mounting threats from all sides – on her southern border with Gaza and her northern border with Syria and Lebanon.

- In Gaza, as the situation spirals into utter chaos, terrorist groups continue to rain down Qassam rockets into Israel – more than 1400 of them since Israel's unilateral pullout from Gaza. As the toll in lives and property continues to mount, we should also keep in mind the psychological toll inflicted on our brothers and sisters in Sderot who live under near-constant bombardment.
- Syria has, over the past several weeks, increased its military presence on the border of the Golan Heights and continues to help Iran resupply Hizballah with arms and explosives. Syria also continues to actively destabilize the fragile Lebanese democracy and stonewall United Nations attempts to conduct a thorough inquiry into the assassination (allegedly ordered by Syrian officials) of anti-Syrian Lebanese leader Rafik Hariri.
- Hizballah continues its rearmament efforts and its efforts to bring down the Siniora government.

Israel is and always has been the center of the Jewish world. We face Jerusalem three times daily, mention the Holy City in our services and in *Birkat Hamazon*, and have thousands of years of literature and liturgy demonstrating an eternal love of *Eretz Yisrael*. As the threats against her mount and the possible necessity of an Israeli response increases, we pray for peace even as we support Israel's right to defend herself. ■

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