

JULY 16, 2007

## Parashat D'varim

### Something to (Re)Prove

**Bein Paran u'vein Tofel v'Lavan va'Chatzerot v'Di-zahav “Between Paran and Tofel and Lavan and Chatzeirot and Di-zahav” (Deuteronomy 1:1)**

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As the wandering of *B'nei Yisrael* is set to come to an end, Moshe begins the last of his teaching with what our teachers tell us is a rebuke. Rather than interpreting this *pasuk* as merely a list of locations, the rabbis see it as a registry of actions for which *B'nei Yisrael* should be rebuked. Paran is the place from which the spies were sent. Rashi tells us that Moshe rebuked the Israelites for the way they slandered (*sh'tafli*) the manna they ate in the wilderness, which was white (*lavan*). Chatzeirot was the location of Korach's rebellion and Miriam's defamatory talk about Moshe. Di-zahav recalls the incident of the golden (*zahav*) calf.

Unlike Moshe's actions at the beginning of our *parashah*, Talmud (Shabbat 119a) tells us that one of the reasons for the destruction of Jerusalem was that people did not rebuke each other when it was called for. Next week, as our people commemorate Tisha b'Av and mourn the destruction of our Temples, we should remember that failure to address dangerous behavior is an invitation for that behavior to continue and for the consequences that come later.

In our day, the destruction of our Temples reminds us to take threats seriously and act on them.

Time is running out to stop Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. As members of the U.N. Security Council continue to discuss potential new sanctions on Iran, Tehran is close to overcoming key technological hurdles that will enable it to enrich uranium on the scale needed to produce fuel for nuclear weapons. The United States needs to exhaust every economic, diplomatic and political tool to persuade the Iranian government to end its nuclear program. We should ask our representatives to vote for H.R. 1400, the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act, and H.R. 2347, the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act. We should ask our Senators to vote for S. 970, the Senate counterpart to H.R. 1400.

Let our mourning this Tisha b'Av steel our resolve to protect our people and our world from calamity both by our own right behavior and by offering rebuke when it is called for – even on the international level. ■

### Truth in Advertising

**Vayomru tovah ha'aretz “And they said, ‘the land is good’” (Deuteronomy 1:25)**

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In reviewing the incident of the spies, Moshe recounts that, upon completing their mission, they came back and praised the land. But wasn't the report of the spies discouraging? Why does the Torah recount this part of the story first and only in the next *pasuk* point out the spies negative comments? Rashi suggests that our *pasuk* reflects the words of Yehosua and Caliev – the only two to praise the land. But the Chatam Sofer, in his commentary, says that

all the spies could have made these seemingly positive comments – the land is so good that those who presently inhabit it will fight hard for it.

Some people call words like these a “backhanded compliment.” We all know people whose words sound positive but, in reality, are negative.

It seems we hear a lot about “peace” from people like Syria’s Bashar Assad, Iran’s Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, or Hamas’ Ismail Haniyeh. Their words, at first, can sound appealing. But, like the words of the spies, it seems they are always peppered with just enough evil intent to rob us of our hopes for peace in the near future. Just last week, Prime Minister Olmert invited Assad to sit down to discuss peace “anywhere, anytime.” Assad refused. Hamas is willing to buy electricity and water from Israel, but last week began shelling an important border crossing between Israel and Gaza in order to keep out Israeli fruit shipments. True, this means Gazans won’t have fresh fruit to eat – but fruit is expendable when your goal is terrorism. Water and electricity are not.

We pray that all of Israel’s neighbors may learn from the examples of Yehoshua and Caleiv – that they may speak truthfully and forthrightly. When they do, they will find in Israel a ready partner for peace. ■

## Avoiding Provocation

### **Al titgaru vam “Do not provoke them” (Deuteronomy 2:5)**

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As *B’nei Yisrael* prepare to pass through the land of *B’nei Esav*, they are commanded to take great care to avoid a war with the Edomites. But in the preceding *pasuk*, we read of the Edomites *v’yiru mikem*. If the Edomites are afraid of the advancing Israelites, why should our ancestors have taken care not to provoke them? The Chatam Sofer answers that, despite the vulnerability of the Edomites, their land is not part of what has been promised. Thus, we have no reason to pick a fight.

One of the ideas that Moshe repeats in Sefer D’varim is the Torah’s demand that, in all wars, Israel must first beseech the enemy for peace, as the Rambam writes citing Deuteronomy 20:10, “War, should not be waged against anyone until they are offered the opportunity of peace, as it says, ‘When you approach a city to wage war against it you should propose a peaceful settlement.’” (Yad Hilchot Melachim 6:1-4)

This is a theme not only repeated in Sefer Devarim, but demonstrated in the history of the modern Jewish state.

Since Gaza was taken over by the terrorist group Hamas, Israel has done everything in its power to support the positive steps taken by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas while continuing to provide humanitarian aid to the people under Hamas’ control. While Israel has made clear that she is not interested in fighting, Hamas continues to tunnel explosives and weapons into Gaza and launch rockets at Sderot. The international community should work to strengthen—with proper oversight—Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and a P.A. committed to the fight against terror. The new PA must continue to adhere to the Quartet’s three principles: recognition of Israel, renunciation of terrorism and acceptance of previous agreements.

Israel stands – as she always has – ready to make peace. Rather than provoking the Palestinians, Israel is working to bolster President Abbas while providing for the needs of the people of Gaza. ■

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