

JULY 30, 2007

Parashat Eikev

Stiff-Necked People

Ki am k'shei oref atah "For you are a stiff-necked people" (Deuteronomy 9:6)

In this section of our *parashah*, we read that God is giving the land to *B'nei Yisrael* not because of their righteousness but because of the sinfulness of the current inhabitants. In fact, the Israelites are admonished and warned several times for being stiff-necked.

Sforno, in his commentary on this verse, says that it is impossible to be righteous while being stiff-necked. Instead of listening to reason, the stiff-necked person follows only his own feelings. R. Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler teaches us (Michtav Mei'Eliyahu 1:63) that a stiff-necked person is "someone (who) sees the truth with his own eyes but is still not willing to change his negative ways."

Having suffered international condemnation and sanctions for his country's illegal pursuit of nuclear weapons, one would think that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would have changed his negative ways. Instead, he has gone on to host an international Holocaust-denial conference, overtly support terrorist organizations, make further not-so-veiled threats against Israel, and continue his mad rush toward nuclear weapons. His country has suffered political isolation, economic sanctions, and is facing a growing divestment movement in the United States. Still, Ahmadinejad shows no sign of blinking.

Now is the time to increase the pressure on Tehran by legislative and economic means. We should ask our representatives in Congress to support the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act and the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act. We should also support groups working in our states to divest state pension funds from companies doing business with the Iranian regime.

Ahadinejad and the mullahs of Iran are, indeed, a stiff-necked group. We must act immediately to open their eyes and change their negative behaviors. ■

Made to Travel

V'zachartah et kol ha'derech asher holichachah "So remember this whole path that you have been made to travel" (Deuteronomy 8:2)

In reminding the people to keep God's commandments, Moshe essentially tells *B'nei Yisrael* not to forget what they've just been through: forty years of wandering. As the people excitedly anticipate a new beginning in the Promised Land, Moshe understands how easy it can be to forget – or ignore – history. Our tradition, however, is one of honest assessment of circumstances; as Pirkei Avot (3:1) tells us, *da mei'ayin batak u'l'an atah holeich*.

An honest assessment of the current situation with Iran should leave us with no illusions as to the seriousness of the threat to Israel and the West. Iran, which the U.S. State Department has long had on its list of state-sponsors of terrorism, is the chief destabilizing factor in the Middle East. It is the main benefactor of Hamas and Hizballah. Despite being a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), it has spent more than two decades deceiving the international community by illegally developing nuclear power behind closed doors and, more recently, has reneged on its promises under the NPT by failing to abide by unanimous U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding Tehran cease plutonium enrichment activities.

It is worth noting the use of *holichachah*. Note that the Torah does not use the *kal* form of the verb – rather, it talks about the path “you have been made to travel.” Just as the Israelites’ wanderings were forced on them, so too has Iran forced the world down our present course.

We must act quickly to support legislation to combat Iran’s nuclear nightmare and to support divestment efforts aimed at the weak points in Iran’s economy – specifically, its energy sector. It is not too late to begin down a new path provided we are honest in our assessment of our current one. ■

Trust, Promise, Security

U’l’davka vo “*And cleave to Him*” (Deuteronomy 11:22)

As our *parashah* comes to a close and we have just read the words that comprise the second paragraph of the Sh’ma, we come to this strange commandment to “cleave” to HaShem. Rashi even seems to think the wording is odd, wondering if it is even possible to “cleave” to God in the physical sense implied by the verse. Rather, he says, one should cleave to Torah scholars and to the sages. But Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohein commented on this verse that this is actually the commandment of *bitachon* – trust in God.

It is interesting to note the use of the word *bitachon*. In Modern Hebrew, of course, the term means “security.” Israel’s Defense Minister, for example, is called *Sar HaBitachon*. The word itself comes from the three-letter root for “promise.” The wisdom of *lashon ha’kodesh* could not be more evident than in its linking trust, security, and promise.

These three concepts are also evident in the relationship between the United States and Israel. Like all close alliances, Israel and the U.S. trust one another by cooperating in areas such as intelligence-sharing and cooperation in development of security strategies. They provide each other with security by working together to develop military technology and sharing developments with each other. And the promise that exists between them – of mutual support in military, intelligence, and economic partnership – is one of true friendship.

As the U.S. and Israel negotiate a new long-term foreign aid agreement, we should remind our representatives in Congress of the security provided to both countries by the U.S.-Israel friendship and of the trust and promise placed by each in the other. ■