

JULY 23, 2007

## Parashat Va'etchanan

### Cherished Support

**Eh'brah nah v'er'eh et ha'aretz "Please let me go over and see the land" (Deuteronomy 3:25)**

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In this section of our *parashah*, Moshe poignantly discusses the fact that he will not be permitted to cross into Eretz Yisrael. It is interesting to note that Moshe's primary focus is on the Land – he doesn't ask HaShem for any special consideration for himself, he is interested only in seeing the beloved Promised Land. In his commentary, Ibn Ezra teaches us that the purpose of this section of Torah is to teach us to cherish the Land of Israel.

While Jews around the world cherish Eretz Yisrael for spiritual, religious and cultural reasons, American Jews have our own patriotic reasons to love and support Israel. In addition to commonly held values of freedom and democracy, aid to Israel is an investment in vital American security interests.

- Aid to Israel has long been a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. It is a cost-effective way of serving America's national security interests in the Middle East, bolstering a reliable U.S. ally in a volatile and critically important region.
- Israel stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the United States in the global war on terror and in countering the most dangerous threats the U.S. faces in the region, including terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the spread of radical Islam.
- Israel plays a vital role in helping U.S. forces in the region by providing invaluable intelligence, sharing proven military tactics and contributing sophisticated military technologies.
- At one percent of the federal budget, the foreign aid bill provides the United States with the tools to pursue an active and engaged foreign policy.

As Israel and the United States negotiate a new 10-year aid package, we should remind our representatives in Congress of the huge benefits derived from this small investment. ■

### Good Start

**Az yavdil Moshe shalosh arim "So Moshe separated out three cities" (Deuteronomy 4:41)**

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Even though he will not live to see them established, Moshe dutifully sets aside three cities as places of refuge. Rashi comments that Moshe was thinking "any mitzvah I can fulfill, I will fulfill."

R. Shlomo Ephraim of Luntchitz, the Kli Yakar, commented that this teaches us an important principle. Often, if a person feels he will not be able to complete a project, he will not even want to begin. Moshe teaches us that anything worth doing is worth doing now – even if we might not be the ones to complete the task.

President Bush's Middle East speech last week represents an important opportunity for the Palestinians to achieve their own state living in peace and security alongside Israel. The Palestinians must decide if they want to pursue the path of terrorism or choose peaceful negotiations with the Jewish state. The new Palestinian government of President Mahmoud Abbas has taken important initial steps by rejecting violence, recognizing Israel and beginning the process of arresting terrorists. If followed with consistent action and supported by moderate Arab states, these steps can serve as the foundation for negotiations toward a two-state solution.

We all know the famous teaching from Pirkei Avot – *lo alechah ha'm'lachah ligmor, v'lo atah ben chorin l'hibateil mimenah*. President Abbas may be the one to finally lead the Palestinian people to peace or he may not be. Only time will tell. What is important is that he is taking steps toward a responsible policy that will make peace possible. ■

## Hope and Comfort

### **Nachamu nachamu ami “Comfort, comfort my people” (Isaiah 40:1)**

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Shulchan Aruch (Orech Chaim 428:8) teaches us that, “from the 17th of Tammuz we read the three haftarot of destruction, we then read seven weeks of haftarot that focus on comfort.” This past week, our people observed Tisha b'Av and remembered the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem. With this week's portion, we begin a new period of the year and we turn our attention from destruction to the comfort of the Divine Providence our people enjoy.

For two thousand years our nation has read these haftarot with the hopes of a future redemption. But after 2000 years, comfort is hard to find. Our Sages tell us that our redemption will not be random; we will merit the redemption when we perfect ourselves.

With all the tragedies of the past year – terrorist attacks, kidnapped soldiers, and war in Lebanon – it seems like the last thing we find is comfort. Though it might be easy to become discouraged, our tradition always finds room for hope...*nachamu nachamu ami!*

In the midst of all the difficulties, there is hope on the horizon. Israel is working closely with the new government of Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas to prepare the groundwork for future negotiations on the creation of a Palestinian state and to help improve Palestinian living conditions. Israel has taken concrete steps to support Abbas:

- Israel released \$120 million in tax revenues to the new Palestinian government and pledged to return an additional \$600 million in withheld funds.
- The Israeli government released 250 Palestinian prisoners affiliated with Fatah in order to bolster Abbas' new government.
- Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to discuss ways to improve Palestinian living conditions without harming Israel's security.
- The Israeli military has scaled back arrest operations in the West Bank. Any new operation will now require approval from the senior army command except for incidents where there is specific intelligence concerning a potential threat.
- Nearly 180 wanted Palestinians in the West Bank are being granted amnesty after they signed pledges not to carry out attacks against Israelis.

In turn, the new PA government has thus far rejected rapprochement with Hamas, begun disarming militia groups, arrested terrorists, and taken further steps to demonstrate its commitment to peace with Israel.

Even in a time of great difficulty, we can be proud that Israel continues to live up to the words of her anthem - *od lo avda tikvateinu!* ■