

AUGUST 27, 2007

Parashat Ki Tavo

As If

Ki vati el ha'aretz "That I have entered the land" (Deuteronomy 26:3)

In the ceremony of the first fruits, we do not say to the *kohanim*, "My ancestors entered the land." Rather, we identify ourselves with this event in our people's history as if we had been personally present. This calls to mind the Passover Seder – of which we are further reminded a few *p'sukim* later in our *parashah* with the *Arami oveid avi* – when we recite *b'chol dor va'dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatzah mi Mitzrayim*. We all left Egypt. We all stood at Sinai. We all crossed the Jordan. Martin Buber called this phenomenon, "The identification of the individual with the collective Jewish consciousness."

We are now called upon to stand together as our brothers and sisters in Israel face a series of serious military threats. As the terrorist threats from Hamas and Hizballah grow on her northern and southern borders, as the specter of a nuclear Iran looms over the region, as rockets fall daily on Sderot and other communities in southern Lebanon, and as Syria's Bashar Assad talks about peace while conducting an ever-larger military build-up on the Syrian-Israeli border, we should stand together as we have before.

We should take note that the *b'chol dor va'dor* does not say we actually have to go forth from Egypt. There is no annual, physical reenactment of the Exodus. One is commanded *lirot et atzmo* – to see himself – as if he has gone forth from Egypt. At this season of *cheshbon nefesh*, we should have our eyes open to the struggle of our brothers and sisters in Israel. And we must act as though it is our fight, too. ■

A Stronger Mandate

HaShem Elokeichah m'tzavchah "HaShem your God commands you" (Deuteronomy 26:16)

In his rules of which of the commandments count among the 613 *mitzvot*, Rambam explains that any *mitzvah clali* – any command that is general in nature and without a specific action – cannot be counted as one of the 613 *mitzvot*. If these general commands, like our verse, are not counted as *mitzvot*, what is their purpose?

While the Torah tells us several times to observe the law in its entirety, these general *mitzvot* drive the point home, allowing us to understand that each and every *mitzvah* is to be observed. Our *pasuk* goes on to qualify observance of the law with the need to perform the *mitzvot* wholeheartedly. It isn't enough to simply have the Torah: one must perform the *mitzvot* and do so with all of their effort and energy.

As part of the end of the second Lebanese war, the United Nations pledged to guard the borders of Israel and Lebanon. Despite this pledge, Hizballah, with the assistance of Iran and Syria, continues to amass thousands of rockets and other sophisticated weaponry. Top U.N. officials have concluded that the Syrian-Lebanese border is being used to smuggle arms to Hizballah and that the terrorist group is reconstructing fortifications throughout Lebanon.

The current mandate of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is insufficient to prevent Iran and Syria from rearming the terrorist group Hizballah. The U.N. mandate does not allow UNIFIL to deploy along the border with Syria without a call from the Lebanese government, which has yet to make such a request. An independent mission sent by the U.N. to assess the border found “the present state of border security was insufficient to prevent smuggling, in particular of arms, to any significant extent,” adding that given the present situation it is “still possible for arms to be smuggled undetected through the border line.” U.N. forces are limited to operations in southern Lebanon, allowing Hizballah and other terrorists to operate freely north of the Litani River and in the Bekka Valley. The area between the Litani River and Israel’s border is at some points narrow as four kilometers.

The U.N. Security Council needs to expand the mandate of the U.N. forces in Lebanon which have failed so far to stop the smuggling—if it is serious in seeking to curb illegal weapons trafficking into Lebanon. As part of the renewal process of UNIFIL’s mandate, which expires in August, the United States should encourage the Security Council to expand the force’s mandate to allow monitoring of the Lebanese-Syrian border in order to prevent Iran and Syria from rearming Hizballah. The U.N. also should hold Syria and Iran accountable for violating Resolution 1701’s arms embargo against Hizballah through further sanctions on the two regimes.

The U.N. must learn from our *pasuk* that one must not just pass a law and be happy about it – one must abide by the law and do so wholeheartedly. ■

Avoiding Obstacles

Ka’asher y’maseish ha’iveir ba’afeilah “As a blind man gropes in the dark” (Deuteronomy 28:29)

As the Torah outlines a series of blessings and curses, our *pasuk* teaches us that when one disregards HaShem’s commandments, it is as if he gropes at noon as a blind man gropes in the dark. The Talmud (Megillah 24b) questions whether a blind man discerns the difference between day and night and relates the story of R. Yosi’s encounter with a blind man walking in the dark holding a torch. When R. Yosi asks what use the torch is to him, the blind man responds that it is for others to see him and help him avoid obstacles.

Our *pasuk*, R. Yosi says, reminds us of our obligation to help others along the straight and narrow path.

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, including transferring withheld Palestinian tax revenues and approving the release of Palestinian prisoners.

The new PA government has begun efforts to fight terrorism, end corruption and establish good governance – critical steps needed to create the possibility for constructive negotiations with Israel and to improve the daily lives of Palestinians. Abbas must continue to reject rapprochement with Hamas and take further steps to demonstrate his commitment to peace with Israel.

For years, the world has urged the PA to end corruption and support for terrorism, but Palestinian leaders preferred to stumble in the dark. Helping the PA do a better job governing is one of the ways that Israel is improving the lives of Palestinians. It is up to the new Palestinian government to demonstrate that it has taken hold of a torch and is now interested in avoiding obstacles. ■

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