

SEPTEMBER 10, 2007

Parashat Ha'azinu

No Comparison

Ha'azinu hashamayim va'adabeirah "Give ear, heavens, and I will speak" (Deuteronomy 32:1)

This section of the Torah is often referred to as "the Song of Moses." Just before Moshe Rabbenu ascends Har Nevo, he makes one final plea to his people to act according to the laws they have been given. The Netziv, due to the contrasting images of God's righteous attributes with the wicked attributes of a "perverse generation," believed that this section foretold the destruction of the First and Second Temples, the exile, and the eventual rebuilding.

Obviously, it is hardly fair to compare anyone's righteousness – or any other character trait, for that matter – to God's. It is fair, however, to compare and contrast people's traits with those of other people.

In this respect, we should closely examine the actions of Israel and Hamas as they pertain to the ongoing situation in Gaza. As we know, Israel completely withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005 – removing all soldiers, civilians, and settlements. Even after Hamas took over the Palestinian Authority, Israel has continued to supply thousands of tons of humanitarian aid and look for ways to allow Gazan goods to pass through border crossings.

Rather than working to build their society and economy, Palestinian terrorists responded to the Gaza pullout with a barrage of Qassam rockets on cities and towns inside Israel. It is literally a daily siege with the number of rocket attacks greatly increasing in the past week as terrorists target families sending their children back to school. Gaza-based terrorists affiliated with Hamas also continue to hold kidnapped I.D.F. soldier Gilad Shalit.

Residents of Gaza are living through a "perverse generation" of leadership and would be better served by officials who were more interested in bettering the lives of the average Palestinian than in lobbing missiles at Israeli school-children. ■

Merit Deficiency

B'hanheil Elyon goyim "When the Most High set the inheritance of nations" (Deuteronomy 32:8)

Rambam (Yad Hilchot T'shuvah 3:1) tells us that one who has more merit than sin is called a *tzaddik* while one who has more sin than merit is called a *rasha*. Rambam further explains that this applies to entire countries as well. If the merits of all of a country's inhabitants are more numerous than its sins, the land is called righteous, and if it has more sins than merits, it is called wicked.

While Rambam is clearly discussing the individual citizens of a nation, this principle can be extrapolated to those who govern nations, as well. In this regard, Iran presents us with a clear case of merit deficiency.

Tehran's list of sins is long and growing. It spent twenty years lying to the international community about its illegal pursuit of nuclear weapons and continues to defy two U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding it stop enriching

plutonium. It has openly called for the destruction of another sovereign nation – Israel – and has held a Holocaust denial conference. It is recognized as the world’s largest state-sponsor of terrorism – including being the main benefactor of Hizballah and Hamas.

In another demonstration that the mullahs are knee-deep in international terrorism, a U.S. federal judge ruled last week that Iran was responsible for the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut. The bombing was carried out by Hizballah, but U.S. District Judge Royce C. Lambert ruled that Iran’s material and financial support for the terrorists made them responsible for the attack.

In this season of *t’shuvah*, we hope that Iran will turn from its support of terrorism, its vicious anti-Semitism, and its reckless desire for nuclear weapons. If not, we must work to make certain that the international community holds Iran to account for its wickedness. ■

Worth Every Penny

Ki lo davar reik hu mikem “For this is not an empty thing for you” (Deuteronomy 32:47)

As Moshe’s song closes and he is ordered to ascend Har Nevo, he issues this parting promise to *B’nei Yisrael*. He continues saying *ki hu chayeichem!* You have everything to gain from living by the Torah! Chizkuni, in his commentary on the *pasuk*, interprets it differently – you will not do it without cost. What does he mean?

It has never been easy to be a Jew. Our ancestors suffered greatly for their adherence to Torah. Chizkuni seems to tell us that this *pasuk* is a promise with a warning: it will be difficult, but it will be worth it!

As we know, the Hebrew words for “repentance” and “return” come from the same root – *shin-vav-bet*. In these days between Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur, we pay special attention to the fact that repentance and return are branches of the same tree. Our tradition calls on us to make a *cheshbon nefesh* – a spiritual accounting. Just as a business must keep track of profit and loss, so do we need to know where we have succeeded and where we have failed.

Midrash Kohelet Rabbah teaches us, “Run not too far, for you must return the same distance.”

For some of our congregants and friends, the path of return this year may be a long one. In a time when polling and sociological studies tell us that more and more individual American Jews are becoming detached from their people, we hope the New Year will be a year of reconnection and strengthened ties. At a time when support for Israel in our own community is lower than it should be, we pray that the New Year will find us more united.

Like Chizkuni tells us about adherence to Torah, uniting our community to protect Israel in these dangerous times will not be easy. We will not do it without cost. But a secure Israel living in peace with her neighbors will be worth the effort. Children safely attending school in Sderot will be worth the effort. Northern Israeli communities living without fear of Katyusha rockets will be worth the effort. The safe return of Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser, and Eldad Regev will be worth the effort. And a vibrant, united American Jewish community – also a worthy effort – is just what is needed at this moment in history. ■