



Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 18, 2008

Parashat Eikev

Have No Fear

Lo ta'arotz mipneihem... – “You shall not be broken before them” (Deuteronomy 7:21)

When commanding the Jewish people to combat their enemies and defend the Land of Israel, Moses tells them, “You shall not be fearful of them.” In essence Moses is encouraging the nation, assuring them that God will grant them divine protection. Rambam sees these words not merely as support, but also as a negative Torah commandment. Rambam tells us that God forbids the Jewish soldier, “from fearing [the enemy] during times of war” (Book of Commandments, Negative Commandment 58). Thus Moses actually instructs the people with two commandments: one, to fight to defend the Land of Israel and a second, not to be afraid during the trying test of battle. While most of us will never have to face the test of this commandment, Rambam’s explanation of the commandment applies to us all: “It is incumbent upon us to strengthen ourselves and stand up and remain steadfast in our strength...”

Today, as Jewish Americans, it is still important for us to be assertive in our role of defending the Jewish people. By working with Congress we can “strengthen ourselves” in the halls of government and help ensure that the United States remains committed to Israel’s qualitative military edge.

This past summer Congress passed, and the president signed into law, legislation locking in the first year of the administration’s requested increase in security assistance to Israel, expected to total \$2.55 billion in fiscal year 2009. The request represents the first part of a new 10-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) reached last year by the United States and Israel, whereby aid to Israel will increase on an annual basis, averaging \$30 billion over the course of the MOU. However, despite the MOU the increase in foreign aid to Israel must be reauthorized on an annual basis as part of the overall foreign aid bill. We must be vigilant in letting our members of Congress know that supporting aid to Israel represents the mutual interests of deterring war, promoting stability and eventually achieving peace.

Rambam reminds us that according to the Torah no Jew may shun his or her responsibility to protect and defend the Jewish State. By supporting U.S. security aid we can help fulfill the mitzvah to protect Israel. ■

Words of Thanks

U’veirachta et Hashem Elohecha – “And bless the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 8:10)

The Torah commands us that after we eat bread to the point of satisfaction, “[you shall] bless the Lord your God for the good Land which He has given you.” When we enjoy the food that God has given us, we must then bless and thank God for the bounty bestowed upon us. While nowadays we recite a standard text for the Grace after Meals, the rabbis in the Talmud (Sotah 33a) derive from this verse that one may thank God in any form. Says the Talmud, “And bless [God] in any language that you wish to bless.” In addition, reciting blessings instills in us the value of *hakarat hatov* – appreciating the good that God and others do for us, and tangibly expressing that gratitude with words of thanks.

The Torah teaches a vital lesson, that it is not only important to be thankful for benefit received but that it is important to express that appreciation. Today, as Americans who care about Israel, we have a wonderful opportunity to express our gratitude to the majority of Congress who recently voiced their support for tougher sanctions against Iran.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently overwhelmingly passed House Concurrent Resolution 362 (H. Con. Res. 362) with 261 cosponsors. This resolution urges the President to use his authority to impose even stiffer sanctions on financial institutions and companies doing business with Iran, and “demands that the President initiate an international effort to increase economic, political, and diplomatic pressure on Iran to suspend its nuclear enrichment activities.” We should all take the time to contact our representatives and thank them for supporting this resolution. Building a relationship and maintaining contact with your member of Congress is an important part of our democratic process and by thanking your representative for his or her support of Israel you send the message that Israel is an issue which is important to the constituents that he or she was elected to serve. Many Congressional offices keep a tally of how many phone calls, emails and letters they receive on a myriad of issues, and your voice strengthens the call to stand with Israel. For more information on H. Con. Res. 362, to read the full text of the bill, to find out if your representative signed on as a cosponsor or to thank your representative for his or her support click [here](#).

We should take the time to practice *hakarat hatov* by contacting our Congressional representatives who cosponsored this resolution to thank them for making their voices heard. In doing so, we give them the backing and support that they need to continue their hard work on behalf of the forces of peace, democracy and freedom in the world. ■

Looking for Trouble

B’rishat ha’goyim ha’eleh – “For the wickedness of these nations” (Deuteronomy 9:5)

Moses reminds the Jewish people that aside from their own merit, they would emerge victorious over their enemies due to “the wickedness” of the nations already inhabiting the Land. Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz, (1730-1805) in his commentary “Panim Yafot” suggests that Moses refers not to the nations currently inhabiting the land but rather to the nations of Sichon and Og. Commenting further Rabbi Horowitz states that these nations are worthy of punishment because, “The Jewish nation only requested to pass through their land, and they [Sichon and Og, were judged] because they unnecessarily engaged in war against Israel” (see Panim Yafot on Exodus chapter 23).

Like Sichon and Og, Iran has instigated unprovoked hostility towards the Jewish nation. Also like Sichon and Og, who suffered for their acrimony, so too the Iranian government is paying a price for their animosity in the form of increasingly harsh sanctions.

Recently, the U.S. Treasury Department designated five entities for their ties to Iran’s nuclear and missile programs, a move that freezes their assets and inhibits their participation in the international banking system. “Responsible financial institutions and businesses worldwide are taking steps to avoid doing business with Iranian nuclear and missile entities, as well as with the front companies and cut-outs the Iranian regime uses to disguise its activities,” said Stuart Levey, under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence. “These five nuclear and missile entities have been used by Iran to hide its illicit conduct and further its dangerous nuclear ambitions.” To supplement this resolve the United Nations Security Council should impose a fourth round of sanctions against Iran for its defiance of the previous three sanctions resolutions demanding a halt to the Iran’s uranium enrichment. Ultimately, the United States and our allies should aggressively spearhead international efforts to impose tougher sanctions on Iran, including a ban on the sale of refined petroleum products, to further isolate and pressure the regime to change course.

The Iranian government, like Sichon and Og, is demonstrating undeserved hostility toward the Jewish people. The international community, by imposing stronger sanctions, can demonstrate once and for all that it means business and as Rabbi Horowitz stated, that there is a price for those who “unnecessarily engage in war against Israel.” ■