

AUGUST 11, 2008

Parashat Va'etchanan

Ending the Discussion

Al tosef daber eilai od... – “Do not continue to speak to me” (Deuteronomy 3:26)

Our *parashah* opens with Moses again pleading with God to be able to enter the Land of Israel. At this point God seemingly has had enough, telling Moses, *rav lach* – “let it suffice for you.” Stop asking me that question; it is time to end the conversation. Why does God cut Moses off so abruptly? The Midrash (Sifrei on Pinchas, Tanchuma Va'etchanan 8) explains that had Moses continued to beg for God's forgiveness, God would have been obligated to heed Moses' request. Yet God's divine plan required that Moses not enter the Land of Israel and that he pass the mantle of leadership to Joshua. For this reason God tells Moses, “Enough. Stop making this request.” The preparations had been made and God had set the design in motion.

In any planning phase there comes a time to end the formalities and commence action, just as God had done with Moses in commanding him to cease his pleading. Today, the period of empty words to Iran must end to make way for action. The time has arrived for the international community to get tough and enact a serious sanctions regime to stop Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Recently six of the world's most powerful nations offered a package of economic, security and political incentives to Iran in return for a halt of the Iranian nuclear weapons program. In a letter of response Iran ignored the key international demand that it suspend its efforts to enrich uranium and called for protracted open-ended negotiations that U.S. and European officials said would take years. Tehran has once again sought to exploit such overtures, hoping to gain time to perfect its uranium enrichment capabilities and block the imposition of harsher sanctions. The White House responded saying, “In the absence of a positive response to the generous offer that we provided for in our extended package, we think that the allies will have no choice but to take further measures that would be punitive.” International sanctions remain the best way to persuade Iran to forgo its pursuit of nuclear weapons and the United States along with our allies needs to aggressively spearhead international efforts to impose such sanctions.

The United States and other world powers must meet this continued defiance with an immediate and biting sanctions regime. It is time to tell Iran, “*rav lach*.” Let it suffice for you. The time for half hearted rhetoric has ended and Iran must cease her pursuit of nuclear weapons now or prepare to face even tougher international sanctions. ■

Sharpening Our Children

V'shinantam l'vanecha – “And you shall teach [these words] to your children” (Deuteronomy 6:7)

In the first paragraph of the Shema God commands us to “teach these words to our children and recite them in all walks of life.” The Torah uses a word for “teach,” *v'shinantam*, which is difficult to translate. Both Rashi and Rashbam explain that the word *v'shinantam* emanates from the word *shinayim* – “teeth”, implying the need for a sharpness of knowledge and understanding. Rashi elaborates: “these words should be sharp in your mouth, so if someone should ask you about a matter, you need not vacillate. Rather, you can answer him immediately.”

When we educate our children we must invest in teaching with a vision and vigor that will create a sharp and crisp awareness of the issues. The “sharpening” of the Shema refers to issues of faith, but we also have a responsibility to teach our children other important values with this same enthusiasm. As Jews we have a special responsibility to teach our children to promote and defend Israel, whether on the playground or on the college campus.

Recently, the website Campus-watch.org reported that “in his book [Fabricating Israeli History](#), Middle East historian Ephraim Karsh observes that in the field of Middle East studies, propaganda has become the accepted norm, more so than in any other discipline.” Moreover, “The freedom to critique is, predictably, directed mostly at the two Satans, Israel and America, while efforts to curtail speech that academics find uncongenial have long taken the form of ‘speech codes’ and restrictions on ‘hate speech.’” For many students the college campus may be the first place where they experience anti-Israel sentiment. In order to instill our children with the confidence to rebut these views it is not enough to merely teach them to support Israel, but we must also make sure that they can articulate why we support Israel. Students unschooled in anti-Israel propaganda find themselves at a disadvantage, unable to challenge the anti-Israel rhetoric that many encounter on college campuses. Ultimately, if we do not teach our children how to express that support for Israel is an American value then no one else will. For more on the U.S.-Israel relationship click [here](#).

While great effort is required to ensure that our children have the knowledge and confidence to support Israel on their college campuses the alternative is far worse. We must take the time to ensure that our children learn about the issues so that they will be “sharp” and “ready to answer” those who consider Israel to be “the little Satan.” ■

Keeping Their Word

Ha’el hane’eman shomer habrit – “The faithful God, who keeps covenant” (Deuteronomy 7:9)

Throughout our *parashah* is a running theme of keeping one’s word and adhering to one’s oaths. In several places Moses asserts that God brought the Jewish nation to the Land of Israel in order to keep God’s word to the Jewish nation. “Because [God] would keep the oath which He swore unto your fathers, has the Lord brought you out.” (7:8) “Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God; the faithful God, who keeps covenant and mercy.” (7:9) In addition, God expects us to emulate this example and remain faithful to our words as well. Indeed, the third of the Ten Commandments demands that we “Shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” (5:10) When we make commitments (both with God’s name and without) we must adhere to them.

The Torah’s repeated call to be faithful to our word resonates strongly today with Israel who, despite enormous provocation, has steadfastly adhered to its commitments under the Egyptian mediated effort to reduce hostilities and stop terror in and around the Gaza strip.

Israel has maintained her word and adhered to her agreement with Egypt, however Hamas has not upheld its end of the accord. While rocket fire has significantly declined since the calm took effect, more than 20 rockets and mortars have been fired at Israel by various groups in Gaza. At the same time, Hamas continues to use the calm to build up its military capabilities. In fact Shin Bet Director Yuval Diskin newly stated that in recent weeks Hamas has smuggled into Gaza “four tons of explosives ... as well as 50 anti-tank missiles, light arms, and materials for Qassam manufacture – metal rods and gunpowder.” In light of this buildup Israeli officials have stated that they are prepared for military action, and are fully aware that, as Hamas leaders have said in the past, a “tahadiya” often serves as a mere “tactic” in their war against Israel. Proving this claim a senior Hamas leader, Mahmoud Zahar, recently warned that “If the Zionist occupation authorities believe that it is calm in return for calm, they are entertaining illusions...Calm is a weapon in our hands, not a sword brandished on our necks.”

Israel has shown extreme restraint in the face of rocket and other terrorist attacks from Gaza. However, like every other sovereign nation, Israel has the right and responsibility to defend its citizens. We must insist that Hamas begin to “keep their word” and cease all terrorist activities and weapons stockpiling in the Gaza strip. ■