

SEPTEMBER 8, 2008

Parashat Ki Teitzei

The Wayward Son

Ben sorer u'moreh... – “A wayward and rebellious son...” (Deuteronomy 21:18)

Our *parashah* presents the challenging case of the *ben sorer u'moreh* – the wayward son, punished not for his past but for his future. If a young man eats raw meat, drinks wine and steals from others, the Torah tells us that he is, *nidon al shem sofo* – “judged according to his logical end,” and put to death. It is better, Rashi tells us, that he die innocent, than live the inevitable life of crime he is destined for and die a guilty criminal. Yet, the Talmud itself challenges this very notion of punishment. Asks the Talmud, (Sanhedrin 70) “Said Rabbi Shimon: Can it be because he ate a measurement of meat and drank a quantity of wine that his parents would have him executed? Rather, the wayward son never happened, and never will! If so, why was it written at all? Rather, study it and receive reward.”

While a case of the wayward son never historically took place, ideologically it is not so uncommon. In telling us to “study it and receive reward,” the Talmud cautions us to be wary of warning signs of bad behavior, that we may prevent the greater misdeed – the logical conclusion of the evidence before us – from ever taking place.

The world can clearly see the warning signs of the wayward son in the threatening actions and rhetoric of the regime in Iran. According to a Washington Post report a top Iranian official recently claimed that Iran has 4,000 working nuclear centrifuges, a number in line with a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Alireza Sheikh Attar told state television, “There are currently close to 4,000 centrifuges active at Natanz enrichment facility... Another 3,000 centrifuges are being installed.” Iran says it plans to move toward large-scale uranium enrichment that will ultimately involve 54,000 centrifuges that could produce enough enriched material for dozens of nuclear weapons. Just as the wayward son is punished in order to prevent the natural progression of his crimes, so too the United Nations Security Council should punish Iran, by imposing a fourth round of sanctions against the Islamic Republic for its defiance of the previous three sanctions resolutions which demand a halt to the country’s uranium enrichment activity.

We must remember the lesson of the *ben sorer u'moreh*, and ensure that the world averts the threats of this wayward nation before they are actualized. The Talmud reminds us that instead of harming the wayward son we should rehabilitate him and restore him to his rightful place in society. The United Nations must compel Iran to halt its nuclear enrichment, and retake its place among the peaceful and productive nations of the world. ■

A Helping Hand

Hakeim takim imo – “You shall surely lift them up with him.” (Deuteronomy 22:4)

The Jewish people are known for our innate sense of kindness. The Midrash in Devarim Rabbah (3) describes the trait of *gemillut chesed* as one of three primary characteristics of the Jewish people. The Torah enhances this sensitivity by instructing us to help our fellow man in daily life. “You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way, and hide yourself from them.” Rather, *hakeim takim imo* – “You shall surely lift them up with him.” Rashi wonders why the Torah commands us to lift up the animal, *imo*, “with him,” when it should have said, *hakeim takim oto* – “you shall surely lift it up?” Rashi, quoting the Talmud (Baba Metzia 32) explains that this commandment to

help has a limit: the ox owner must also help himself. “But if he sits down and says to you, since the mitzvah falls upon you, [lift up the animal by yourself]...you are exempt.”

While the *mitzvah* demands that we help those in need, the Torah also expects the needy to expend the energy to help themselves. They have no right to sit by on the side and demand help, all the while refusing to exert any effort to improve their own situation. If they do refuse to make that effort, we are not commanded to help them either.

And yet Israel does. Israel is still committed to helping the humanitarian situation in Gaza despite the continuance of attacks and arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip. While rocket fire has significantly declined recently, more than two dozen rockets and mortars have been fired at Israel by various groups in Gaza since the implementation of Hamas’ commitment to Egypt to halt all terror activity in and around the Gaza strip. It is in the face of these ongoing attacks that Israel announced that it recently re-opened several border crossings to the Gaza Strip. These crossings, which had been temporarily closed following a Palestinian rocket attack on southern Israel, were opened in order to permit Palestinians requiring medical treatment to enter Israel. According to a Ha’aretz report fuel, merchandise and humanitarian aid were also brought to Gaza via the Karni, Sufa and Kerem Shalom crossings. The reopening of these crossings demonstrates Israel’s commitment to preventing a humanitarian crisis in Gaza while taking great pains to exhaust non-military options in exercising her right and responsibility to defend her citizens.

Despite the ongoing provocation and the danger to the lives of Israelis living in Sderot and other coastal communities, Israel routinely looks for ways to facilitate humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza. The Hamas regime must live up to its commitments to put a halt to the firing of mortars and rockets into Israel, so that the Israeli assistance will be *imo* – “with them,” and not just *oto* – “for them.” ■

Modern-Day Fences

Ve’asita ma’akeh legagecha – “You shall make a fence for your roof.” (Deuteronomy 22:8)

In a description of this commandment, Sefer Hachinuch envisions a much broader design: “This [imperative] is to build fences around roofs, ditches, pits and the like...so that no living thing should fall into them.” The Chinuch expands: “Included in this commandment is to reinforce any wall or fence which could potentially cause damage.” Essentially, the Chinuch considers this an instruction to use our abilities and resources to save lives. In this extensive commentary on the commandment, the Chinuch describes the importance of avoiding danger and recommends that, “it is worthwhile for a person to pay attention to all of the things that can potentially cause damage,” and avoid them.

In essence, the fences which the Torah refers to are not merely railings. Nowadays they are bicycle helmets, seatbelts, smoke detectors and numerous other advancements humanity has devised to lead healthier, safer and more productive lives; and the list is growing.

Recently, the Israeli based company Nice Systems developed the NICE-Inform platform which, “enables 9-1-1 centers to compile, assemble and integrate various forms of multimedia incident information on a unified system, and synchronize them...for valuable insight, as well as for improved collaboration and efficiency among all the emergency forces involved,” reports the website Israel21c. This new technology, which helps integrate and consolidate a mass of information into a sensible stream, allows rapid responders to catch criminals, save injured people and deal with many other emergency incidents more efficiently than ever before. This technology is already being put to good use in Houston, Texas, which recently added NICE-Inform to its Emergency Center. Now the city has the ability for its police, fire, and emergency medical services to share a single solution for recording and reviewing emergency communications, which will not only enhance reliability, but reduce the department’s overhead and technical support requirements.

The fences that the Torah describes are meant to implore us to do the utmost to protect life and avoid suffering. While Israeli companies develop life-saving software systems, they are also, in the words of the Torah, “building fences.” ■