

OCTOBER 6, 2008

Parashat Ha'azinu - Sukkot

A Lack of Appreciation

Ha'lashem tigmelu zot... – “Do you thus repay the Lord?” (Deuteronomy 32:6)

In the haunting poem that forms the bulk of Ha'azinu, Moses notes the great blessings that God would grant the Jewish people, and chronicles their eventual future abandonment of God. He asks, “Do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?” (32:6) The Midrash (Sifrei) illustrates Moses' point: “To what can this be compared? To a man who stands in the market and curses his father. Those who hear say to him, ‘Fool! Who do you stand and curse? Your father! How much toil did he toil for you? How much effort did he exert on your behalf? And if you don't honor him for the past, you should at least honor him now, so that he doesn't will your inheritance to another!’”

The Midrash reminds us of the importance of demonstrating appreciation for two fundamental reasons. First and foremost, expressing gratitude represents moral and ethical maturity. From a more pragmatic perspective, failure to express appreciation epitomizes bad judgment. At some point, your supporter might one day tire of your lack of appreciation, and stop extending that generosity.

The Palestinian Authority could learn from this Midrash. Over the past several months, Israel has repeatedly demonstrated its desire to take steps towards building trust in the region. Israel released almost two hundred Palestinian prisoners convicted of crimes in Israel, and recently removed numerous security checkpoints and opened crossing points, bringing a positive impact of economic growth to the West Bank. Palestinian officials said that tourism in the Palestinian territories has climbed more than 120 percent in the first half of this year, Agence France Presse reported, a direct result of Israeli efforts to ease travel restrictions in the region.

At the same time, the Palestinian Authority has not only failed to reciprocate and build on Israel's momentum, but instead has threatened to return to violence should current peace talks falter. Chief Palestinian Authority (PA) negotiator Ahmed Qureia said that he would not rule out resorting to violence against Israel in the future, should current negotiations falter, Reuters reported. “If the talks reached a dead end, what do we do? Capitulate? Resistance in all its forms is a legitimate right.” When asked whether he was referring to Palestinian suicide bombings and attacks within the Jewish state, Qureia responded: “All forms of resistance.”

The Palestinian Authority has consistently failed to take advantage of opportunities to build trust with Israel. Even worse, it instead continues to value incitement and violence as a viable means of “resistance.” To paraphrase the words of Moses, “Is this the way to repay Israel's efforts at peace?” ■

The Rain of Moses

Yizal katal imrati – “May my teachings drop like the rain.” (Deuteronomy 32:2)

Rashi explains that Moses wants his teachings to penetrate the Jewish people like rain in the ground. He wants his message to nourish the people like rain nourishes plants. What is the true test of a teacher's success? Success lies in a teacher's ability to inspire his students to follow his lead. If Moses teaches God's word but no one follows, he cannot

consider himself a successful teacher. Only when one's students act on her teaching, can she truly feel that her efforts have born fruit.

Throughout Jewish history, our leaders and teachers have shown us that Jewish observance is not just based in ritual or faith, but in action as well. We affirm our teachers' lessons not simply through study, but through the actions and efforts to help others in need. Israel has consistently manifested this attribute of *chesed*, often standing at the forefront of worldwide efforts to aid countries and peoples ravaged by war, natural disaster or tragedy.

Israeli aid organizations have established several relief operations in the war-torn areas of Georgia, seeking to aid tens of thousands of locals displaced by the fighting with Russia, The Jerusalem Post reported. One of the aid groups, Israel Flying Aid, has opened a soup kitchen in the town of Gori. They produce 3,000 cooked meals a day and distribute hundreds of large packages of dry foodstuffs. Much of the relief effort is being coordinated by IsraAID, an umbrella organization of dozens of Israeli humanitarian groups. The goal of the aid, says Shachar Zehavi, director of IsraAID, is "to show that Israeli civilian aid can get anywhere and help anyone in need, and that the Jewish people and Israel are among the first to help."

When the Jewish people perform acts of kindness we show that we have indeed been nourished by the "rain of Moses' teachings. ■

Clouds of Protection

Ki basukkot hoshavti et B'nei Yisrael – "For I placed the Jewish people in sukkot" (Leviticus 23:43)

Nowhere in the text of Chumash do we find any other mention of these booths. What then are these "sukkot" mentioned in the Torah? The Talmud notes a debate between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer. While Rabbi Akiva posits that our Sukkot commemorate booths and the Jewish nation actually dwelled in the desert, Rabbi Eliezer argues that the people did not live in booths in the desert. Rather, "These were clouds of glory, teaches Rabbi Eliezer." (Talmud Sukkah 11b) Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher, declares that Jewish tradition follows the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer, explaining that "These sukkot that the verse refers to in which God set them are the clouds of glory that surrounded [the people] lest they be struck by heat or the sun." (Tur Orach Chayim 625)

These clouds did not just protect the nation from the elements. They protected the people from enemies as well. The Torah tells us that as the Jewish people hunker down at the Sea of Reeds, "the pillar of cloud removed from before them, and stood behind them," (Exodus 14:19). Rashi (on verse 19) explains that these clouds shielded the people "from the arrows and projectile of Egypt." Thus, when we sit in our Sukkot, we acknowledge the protection of Israel not only from the elements of the desert, but from the arrows and missiles of their enemies.

With a looming threat from Iran, the notion of a shield from enemy attack rings true. So we pray for Israel's protection. But, we also strive to ensure that Israel need not rely solely on divine defense. Due to the support of the United States, Israel will soon gain another level of security.

When a contingent of U.S. soldiers opens a radar facility on a mountaintop in the Negev desert next month, Israel will for the first time in its 60-year history have a permanent foreign military base on its soil, Time Magazine reported. From its mountain perch in Har Keren, the U.S. radar will be able to monitor the take-off of any aircraft or missile up to 1,500 miles away — giving Israel a vital extra 60-70 seconds to react if Iran fired a missile, Israeli military sources told TIME. While Israel has its own radar system trained on Iran, its range is much shorter and would give Israel a shorter warning time to react.

This Sukkot, as we sit in our huts let us commit ourselves to continue our work to protect the people of Israel. Let us ensure that Israel can defend her citizens with the best possible shield. ■

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