

MAY 11, 2009

Parashat Behar-Bechukotai

Friendly Advice

Velo tonu ish et amito – “And you shall not wrong one another” (Leviticus 25:17)

What activity is the Torah prohibiting in this verse? Rashi (on verse 17) explains that this verse refers to *ona'at devarim* – misleading speech. “A person should not trap his friend, nor should he give him inappropriate advice according to the need and benefit of the advisor.” Rashi notes that this prohibition specifically refers to friends, where both parties enjoy common bonds and know each other well. It is precisely due to the intimacy of friendship that one might feel compelled to give advice that is in the best interest of the advisor, thinking that it really is in the best interest of his friend as well. For this reason the Torah warns us to take great diligence and care when giving advice, particularly to our friends, to ensure that the help we give is first and foremost best for them.

Today, the United States, as it formulates its vision of a Middle East peace process, will offer both assistance and counsel to all parties. In doing so, the Torah reminds us that the administration must first consider the concerns and needs of its longtime friend and ally, Israel.

Members of the House of Representatives and Senate are circulating letters to President Obama supporting America’s efforts to help Israel achieve peace with all of her neighbors. These letters are careful to support the concepts that have successfully led to peace treaties between Israel and both Egypt and Jordan. These key principles include supporting direct, bilateral negotiations between the parties, remaining both a trusted mediator between the parties and a devoted friend to Israel, and insisting on an absolute Palestinian commitment to end incitement and violence against Israel. The letters are bipartisan and the lead signatories of the Senate letter are Senators Christopher Dodd (D-CT), Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Arlen Specter (D-PA) and John Thune (R-SD). The House letter was spearheaded by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and House Republican Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA). For more information on the key principles of the peace process, click [here](#).

As more members of Congress join in signing these letters to President Obama, they will strengthen the principle that America must remain “a devoted friend to Israel.” In doing so, the United States must remain wary of *ona'at devarim*, and advise Israel with the Jewish State’s best interests at heart. ■

Sharing the Blessings of Water

Venatati gishmeichem be'itam - “And I shall give the rains in their time” (Leviticus 26:4)

Water is the greatest of gifts as it serves as the root of all blessings. Following the progression of the above verse we see that water brings both crops and abundance. This abundance allows us to “eat to satiety,” and finally leads to safety – “and you shall dwell securely in your land.” Ramban adds that the divine blessing for water did not apply exclusively to rain, but rather the blessing would bring “good, clean air, good rivers and cisterns, which would be the cause of physical health, bring bountiful crops and blessings.”

The blessing for water reminds us of the critical role which water serves throughout the world, providing crops, healthy living and economic prosperity. Nowadays, Israeli expertise has streamlined both the procurement and management of water resources, a proficiency which is being shared with other nations.

Agri Projects, an Israeli for-profit company, will use its proficiency in water management to help Indians living in the Cherrapunjee region of Meghalaya – known as the wettest place on earth – to store rainwater and rebuild forests, according to the website Israel21c. Construction work on the \$5 to \$10 million dollar project, which is being paid for by the Indian government, will commence next month. The pilot project provides India with both the Israeli technology and expertise to conserve water, as well as advisors to assist in growing and irrigating agricultural produce and trees. Additionally, Agri Projects has set up cooperative greenhouses in Mexico with a local partner and the Mexican government. The idea is to give high-tech Israeli greenhouse equipment to Mexicans in rural locations so that they can grow greenhouse produce hydroponically for the U.S. market in the winter, when fresh produce is rare in certain parts of the country. “We are satisfied after we do a project in these kinds of regions,” company director Motti Sharon said, “it gives you a great feeling.”

Not only do these projects give the Israeli managers “a great feeling,” but they also serve as a wonderful way to share the blessings of rain. ■

Eyes Wide Open

Va'hashimoti ani et ha'aretz – “And I will bring the land into desolation” (Leviticus 26:32)

This week we read the famous *tochechah*, Moses’ rebuke of the people and his warning to avoid the behaviors that will bring calamity. Throughout the *tochechah* the Torah uses various forms of the word *shemamah* – desolation. First, the Torah warns the people that God will “bring your sanctuaries unto desolation.” (verse 31) Next, the Torah quotes God as saying “And I will bring the land into desolation.” (verse 32) Finally, the Torah states, “and your land shall be a desolation.” (verse 33) What does this word *shemamah* imply? Ibn Ezra explains that in contrast to simple destruction, desolation means that the land “will so totally be destroyed that even your enemies who descend upon the land will be astonished at it.” Although we traditionally read this section of the Torah quickly with a low voice to express our extreme displeasure with its contents, we never skip it. Our reading of the *tochechah* reminds us that we can never ignore a potential tragedy, but rather we must understand the outcomes of our actions, and be prepared for the consequences.

As we read the *tochechah* we must also open our eyes to the frightening truth of the threats facing Israel from Iran. Just as we cannot simply skip over the rebuke from Moses, we also cannot allow ourselves the luxury of ignoring the warning signs of an Iranian government that continues to deny Israel’s right to exist.

During his recent meeting with President Barack Obama, Israeli President Shimon Peres made precisely this point. According to the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz, Peres told Obama that “The world has no choice but to compare the threat posed by Iran now to that of Nazi Germany before the Second World War.” Further, Peres stated that “Iran is a threat not just to Israel, but to the whole world. As Jews, after being subjected to the Holocaust, we cannot close our eyes in light of the grave danger emerging from Iran...If Europe had dealt seriously with Hitler at that time, the terrible Holocaust and the loss of millions of people could have been avoided. We can’t help but make the comparison.” As the United States hopes to derail Iran’s nuclear program with a combination of diplomacy and economic sanctions, we must remember that the Iranian threat is very real, and that we do not have the luxury of assuming it will dissipate on its own. We must continue to contact our elected officials and urge them to support new legislation aimed at stopping Iran’s nuclear ambitions. For more on how you can support tougher sanctions on Iran, click [here](#).

Just as we cannot ignore the stinging words of the *tochechah*, we also cannot close our eyes to the threats emanating from Iran. Hiding from a potential threat does not make it less critical. ■