

JANUARY 26, 2008

Parashat Bo

Questioning the Sponsor

Ad matai yihiye zeh lanu lemokeish - “How long shall this man be a snare unto us?” (Exodus 10:7)

Parashat Bo reveals the beginning of a schism between Pharaoh and his people. Tradition teaches that before the plague of locusts, in contrast to previous occurrences when God hardened only Pharaoh’s heart, on this occasion God “hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants.” (10:1) Pharaoh’s servants then turned against him, wondering “How long shall this man be a snare unto us? Let the men go.” Why the sudden rift between the leader of Egypt and his people? Kli Yakkar (on verse 1) suggests that until this point, Pharaoh had suffered through the plagues with his people. From the thirst of the blood to the itching of the lice, the King of Egypt could not escape the plagues. However, when the locusts destroyed the remaining Egyptian crops, causing widespread famine, only Pharaoh with his storage of goods was spared the ensuing hunger. When the Egyptian people realized that their leader was willing to cause them suffering that he himself would not endure, they began to question the wisdom of his leadership.

By allowing his people to suffer Pharaoh used their pain to protect his rule. Today, Gazans find themselves in a similar situation having been exploited not only by their own Hamas government, but also by the government of Iran.

In recent years Iran has increased its assistance to Hamas, providing advanced training to hundreds of Hamas terrorists at training camps in Iran and Syria. Iran, through Hamas, has been training Gazans in rocket making, field combat instruction and advanced explosive education. Iran has also assisted Hamas in building stronger, farther-reaching and more stable rockets, and encouraged Hamas to fire those rockets into Israel. Just as with Hizballah in 2006, Iran has again provided the weapons, funding and encouragement for rocket attacks on Israel. Once more Israel has been forced to mount a defensive operation to protect her citizens from Iranian funded projectiles and once more the effects of these operations have damaged the civilian areas from which the rockets were fired. The support that Iran has sent to its proxies, and the damage which it has caused, demonstrates Iran’s willingness to sponsor attacks and let others suffer the consequences. While the situation in Gaza has stoked world passions we must remain cognizant that it is Iran who sponsors Hamas, and provides the support for Hamas’ attacks. The United States must lead international efforts comprised of economic, diplomatic and political pressure to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

To transform tranquility into a lasting peace the people of Gaza must begin to take greater notice of the schism between themselves and their sponsors. Like Pharaoh, Iran is perfectly willing to be an oppressive ruler and let others bear the brunt of the ensuing response. The people of Gaza must begin to ask, “How long shall Mahmoud Ahmadinejad be a snare unto us? Let us make peace, and build a better life for ourselves and our children.” ■

The Morals of Moses

Vayimajer Par’oh likro l’Moshe – “Pharaoh hurriedly called for Moses” (Exodus 10:16)

Despite Moses’ numerous requests for freedom for the Jewish nation Pharaoh stubbornly refused and even increased their workload and suffering. Yet, the Torah states that when the locusts descended upon Egypt, Pharaoh unabashedly ran to Moses begging him to pray to God to stop “this death” afflicting his people. Pharaoh’s pleas presented Moses

with the perfect opportunity to ensure the Jews' freedom. He could demand that Egypt relent and take concrete steps to free the Jews before removing a single locust. However, almost inexplicably, Moses accepted Pharaoh's half-hearted pledge to free the Jews' and prayed on Egypt's behalf, ending the locusts' destruction.

Moses' compassion for the suffering of an adversary and his efforts on behalf of Egypt present an example that Israel strove to emulate during Operation Cast Lead.

During the operation Israel engaged in a comprehensive effort to minimize the impact of the fighting on innocent civilians, despite the nearly 7,000 rockets and mortars fired at Israeli civilians since Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. While Hamas attempted to exploit the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza, Israel facilitated the transfer of food, medicine and humanitarian supplies into the Gaza Strip. In fact, Israel worked to ensure that more than 1,100 trucks carrying over 42,000 tons of humanitarian aid were permitted to enter the coastal strip. Since January 7, the IDF also halted its defensive military operations for three hours each day to implement a "humanitarian recess" which enabled the free flow of food and medicine throughout the Gaza Strip, Voice of America reported. Moreover, the Israeli military set up a field hospital in Gaza to treat Palestinian civilians injured during the fighting.

The compassion which Moses demonstrated for the suffering of fellow human beings, even adversaries, is the foundation of character that justified the redemption from Egypt. Today, Israel's concern for the innocent civilians of Gaza proved to the world that the lessons of Moses remain an inspiration for the nation of Israel. ■

An Egyptian Intervention

Vatechezak mitzrayim al ha'am – "And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people" (Exodus 12:33)

Throughout Passover we eat *matzah* to commemorate an event from Parashat Bo, "And the people took their dough before it was leavened." (12:34) The Children of Israel could not wait until the dough had risen before embarking on their journey because the Egyptians would not let them stay one moment longer. The Torah uses the word *vatechezak* – which Onkelos translates to mean "and they used force," – to describe the Egyptian's actions. Egypt, in its desire to rid itself of the terrible plagues, actually utilized its armed forces to evict the Children of Israel, the very goal those forces has been preventing for hundreds of years. Therefore, our consumption of *matzah* on Passover celebrates not only the fulfillment of God's promise to deliver the Jews from bondage, but is also a testament to Egypt's haste in using its military to evict the Jewish people.

Ancient Egypt came to understand that it must reorient its military energies in order to achieve peace. Nowadays, Egypt is once again shifting its military priorities, however, instead of expelling the Jewish nation, today Egypt is utilizing its forces to prevent weapons smuggling into Gaza.

On January 17th, the United States and Israel signed a Memorandum of Understanding, in which the countries pledged to work together to prevent the supply of weapons, explosives and other military equipment to Hamas. The deal promises the enhancement of security and intelligence cooperation between the United States and Israel, and also includes measures to fight arms smuggling from Iran to Gaza. Egyptian efforts to prevent arms from reaching Gaza through a network of underground tunnels are essential to this process. Speaking during a recent Israeli Security Cabinet briefing, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak stated that Egypt has already begun implementing measures that are helping to prevent arms smuggling in to Gaza. According to Barak, "There is an accumulation of weapons and equipment meant for Hamas in Sinai, but Egypt is preventing it from getting into the Strip." Further, according to Ynetnews.com, Barak also briefed the cabinet on a recent visit to Cairo by the head of the Defense Ministry's Security-Diplomatic Bureau who met with Egyptian officials on the need to address the arms smugglings.

Egyptian efforts remain essential to securing the Egyptian-Gaza border and halting the flow of arms to the radical Hamas regime. Just as the Ancient Egyptian army was able to redirect its focus and "use its strength" to protect the interests of peace, modern Egypt is and must continue working to do the same. ■