

JULY 20, 2009

Parashat Devarim

A World Flowing with Honey

Vayikchu b'yadam mipri ha'aretz – “They took of the fruit of the Land in their hands” (Deuteronomy 1:25)

Moses noted that the spies returned from the Land of Canaan with fruit in their hands, thereby justifying Moses' claim that the Land was indeed “flowing with milk and honey.” (Numbers 13:27) What does this phrase mean? How exactly does a land flow with milk and honey? Kli Yakkar (on Numbers 13:32) explains that because animals graze on the land, the milk which they produce flows “from the land.” In addition, honey “is a term that alludes to the sweetness that comes from the fat of the land.” In essence, the phrase sounds wonderful but is not meant to be taken literally. Rather, it refers to the general abundance that the richness of the Land of Israel produces.

According to Kli Yakkar, the reference to Israel as “a Land flowing with honey” is figurative. However, a new Israeli drug may mean that soon Israel will be known quite literally as the Land from which honey flows.

An Israeli company has developed a revolutionary new drug that could solve the problem of Colony Collapse Disorder, a syndrome that has been wiping out bee communities and threatening agricultural production all over the world, the website Israel21c reports. The drug, Remember – which was developed by the Israeli company Beeologics – has completed successful clinical trials on millions of bees in North America. Based on Nobel prize-winning RNAi technology, Remember helps the bees overcome the IAVP virus which has been associated with colony collapse in scientific literature. “It’s really a tug of war between the virus and the host. We are helping the bee tug the rope more strongly and beat the virus. We are really using naturally occurring phenomenon. It’s not a pesticide and it’s not toxic,” says Nitzan Paldi, CTO of Beeologics. Due to the urgent need for the drug, the Department of Agriculture has been accompanying Beeologics with its Food and Drug Administration certification process.

Kli Yakkar stated that honey was used to represent the abundance in the Land of Israel. If Remember proves effective, Israeli scientists will have successfully ensured that all lands will sustain an abundant amount of bees, and lead to a world flowing with honey. ■

Peaceful Neighbors

Al tatar et Moav - “Be not at enmity with Moab” (Deuteronomy 2:9)

Moses reminded the Israelites of how he had prevented them from conquering neighboring nations on their trek towards the Promised Land. Moses had warned the Israelites not to attack the nations of Moab and Ammon – who were descendants of Lot, or the nation of Se'ir – who were descendants of Esau. Why did Moses specifically prohibit action against these nations? Rashbam (on 2:5) explains that had Moses not forbidden them, the people would have wanted to overtake these nations. Therefore, Moses reminded the Israelites that Esau had been promised his own homeland parallel to Jacob's, and that the descendants of Lot were left in peace “In honor of Abraham, for they were his relatives.”

Rashbam teaches us that the Jewish people were intended to dwell in peace next to our cousins from our forefather Abraham. Today, the State of Israel is taking dramatic steps to make this biblical imperative a modern reality.

At a recent Israeli cabinet meeting, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that “the Palestinian people who live next to us have the basic right to live in security, peace, and prosperity. In recent weeks, we have made many efforts to ease their lives, especially regarding freedom of movement for Palestinians in Judea and Samaria. We have removed many roadblocks and checkpoints... But I would like to make it clear that all of these efforts are unilateral on Israel’s part. All these efforts can only go so far, and the results will multiply many times if only there is cooperation from the other side. Therefore, I call again on the Palestinian leadership in Judea and Samaria, to the leaders of the Palestinian Authority, let us meet. Let us make peace, diplomatic peace and economic peace. Let us cooperate on these projects...there is no reason not to meet, Abu-Mazen and I, anywhere in the country... and begin to advance peace for the benefit of both our peoples.” For more on Israeli steps to boost the West Bank, click [here](#).

Like the Israelites who wished to dwell peacefully next to their neighbors, the State of Israel has demonstrated its desire to create a lasting and durable peace with the Palestinians. The Palestinians must now respond by abandoning their preconditions and coming to the table to resume talks that can truly bring peace, prosperity and security to all. ■

A Giant Problem

Araso eres barzel – “his bedstead was a bedstead of iron” (Deuteronomy 3:11)

Moses included some unusual information while recounting the battle with Og, King of Bashan. In noting the material of Og’s bed, Moses also stated that “nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man.” (3:11) What does this last phrase mean? Rashi (on verse 11) cryptically explains that this “cubit of a man” was Og’s own personal cubit (the length from the elbow to fingertip) – a gargantuan measurement. Why does Rashi add this comment? According to a well-known Midrashic legend, Og was a giant of truly incredible proportions. In several places the Talmud (see Berachot 54b and Niddah 24b) describes Og as a giant who measured in the hundreds of feet. While the Midrashic tradition defies literal interpretation, Moses noted his unusual size to demonstrate that Og was in actuality an adversary of great strength who gave the Jewish people a legitimate reason to have serious concerns.

Og was referred to as a giant because his power and size made him a genuine threat to the Israelites. In modern times, Hizballah might also be referred to as a giant. With the large and powerful arsenal that they have amassed in southern Lebanon, the terrorist army constitutes a true threat to the State of Israel.

A weapons depot containing missiles and other smuggled munitions recently exploded in southern Lebanon. According to an Associated Press report, “the U.N. [United Nations] peacekeeping force in Lebanon called the explosion a ‘serious violation’ of the U.N.-brokered ceasefire that ended a month-long war between Hizballah militants and Israeli forces three years ago.” The blasts caused no casualties, but did highlight the fact that the Shiite militant group has maintained a military presence in the region near Israel’s border. Hizballah fighters are located south of the Litani River despite the deployment of Lebanese troops and U.N. peacekeepers in the area who are operating under U.N. Security Council resolution 1701, which bans such unauthorized guerrilla activity. The Iranian-backed terrorist army has rebuffed U.N. demands to disarm and, with the help of Tehran, has dramatically expanded its arsenal to include some 42,000 rockets capable of striking most Israeli population centers. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said, Hizballah’s weapons supply “dwarfs the inventory of many nation-states.” For more on Hizballah, click [here](#).

Using Rashi’s words to paraphrase Secretary Gates, Hizballah’s growing arsenal represents a “giant” problem that cannot be ignored. The United Nations must step up its inspections and crack down on arms violations before Hizballah armaments begin exploding not just in hidden Lebanese depots, but also in Israeli cities. ■