

AUGUST 31, 2009

Parashat Ki Tavo

Taking Action “Today”

Asher anochi metzaveh etchem hayom – “That which I command of you today” (Deuteronomy 27:1)

The phrase “that which I command you today” appears in slightly different forms three times in chapter 27 (verses 1, 4 and 10), and another three times in chapter 28 (verses 1, 13 and 14). Why did Moses repeatedly mention that he commanded the people “today” when the commandments were really delivered on Sinai more than forty years earlier? Midrash Hagadol explains that the word “today” implies “That the commandments should be dear to you, so each and every day is like [the day of] revelation.” Through his choice of words Moses conveyed the need for urgency in Jewish life. While we can fall prey to lethargy and indifference, Moses reminds us that intensity and passion form critical aspects of our national identity.

Moses’ use of the word “today” was meant to infuse the Jewish people with a sense of urgency to carry out the commandments. In modern times, the Palestinian Authority (PA) could learn from this focus on immediacy and enter into peace talks with Israel without delay.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said recently that he hoped to restart peace talks with the Palestinians in the coming weeks, though Palestinian leaders said they would boycott talks until Israel meets a series of preconditions, The Jerusalem Post reported. “Israel, the U.S., and others are interested in resuming direct talks with the Palestinians,” Netanyahu told a weekly cabinet meeting. “This can possibly be done in late September, but will first require reaching understandings with the Americans and the Palestinian Authority.” Netanyahu’s upbeat message came in sharp contrast to a statement from the PA saying that it would not return to the negotiating table with Israel as long as construction in the settlements and eastern Jerusalem continued. However, since March the Israeli government has reportedly not issued a single tender for building in West Bank settlements, including the large settlement blocs. For more on Israeli steps towards peace, and actions the Palestinians could take “today,” click [here](#).

The Palestinians must show that they, too, are prepared to end the conflict, and cease looking for excuses to avoid peace talks with Israel. If Mahmoud Abbas is serious about creating a Palestinian state, he must forgo the pretexts and commit to talks “today.” ■

Misleading the Blind

Arur mashgeh iver – “Cursed be he that makes the blind to go astray” (Deuteronomy 27:18)

While the prohibition against placing a stumbling block before the blind appears earlier in the Torah (Leviticus 19:14), this despicable act receives special attention as one of the twelve cursed behaviors mentioned during the ceremony on Mount Ebal. Rashi notes that in addition to the tangible physical act, this commandment has an ethical equivalent as well. Rashi states that a person should not give bad advice to another person “who is blind in an issue” in order to take unfair advantage of that person. Why though does this prohibition merit the special attention of the public curse on Mount Ebal? Sforno (on verse 18) explains, “For these sins were generally perpetrated by the heads of the nation,” inferring that people in positions of leadership have the ability to abuse their power and give bad

advice for their own gain. For this reason the Jewish people communally decried this practice and declared it a national responsibility to ensure the protection of the weak from the abuses of those in authority.

The communal commitment to prevent the powerful from using their positions to give bad, self-interested advice, gives reason for the world to be very suspicious of the Islamic Republic's demand to ban military strikes on nuclear installations.

“Iran, [who believes its]... nuclear facilities are under threat of possible Israeli military strikes, has enlisted the support of more than 100 nonaligned nations in its push for a ban on such attacks,” the Associated Press reported. Iran has convinced the nonaligned nations to press for a ban at the upcoming International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) meetings scheduled to convene next month. Iran, which has thwarted IAEA efforts to investigate its nuclear program, has now turned to the IAEA in a bid to protect the type of nuclear proliferation which the IAEA is mandated to prevent. “A senior NAM [Non-Aligned Movement] diplomat said the proposal was well-intentioned in principle because it would promote nuclear safety and security in the Middle East,” Reuters reported. “‘But of course the fact Iran proposed it stirs suspicions. It would have been different if Egypt or a Western country had done so,’ the diplomat said.”

More than simply “stir suspicions,” Iran's proposal represents the cursed prohibition of “misleading the blind” with self-interested advice. The nations of the world must reject Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons, and use every economic and diplomatic tool available to achieve this goal. ■

The Treasure of Water

Yiftach Hashem lecha et otzaro hatov – “The Lord will open unto you His good treasure” (Deuteronomy 28:12)

According to this verse, responsibility for the rain that fell around the world rested in the hands of the Jewish people. If they acted meritoriously, the rains would come not just in Israel, but in all the other lands as well. The Sages in Devarim Rabbah derived this principle from a specific word in the Torah. “‘The Lord will open to you His good treasure – the heaven – to give the rain.’ What is the meaning of the word *lecha* (to you)? Rather, in your merit the rains will fall [for everyone].” According to this Midrash, the rain does not come only to the Jewish people, but rather the entire world would enjoy the blessings of rain because of the actions of the Jewish nation.

As the Midrash considered the nation of Israel to be the spiritual source of the world's water, the State of Israel has now become a physical source for clean water supplies. Cutting edge Israeli technology helps produce sorely needed water across the globe, and many countries have turned to Israel to help manage their water supplies.

Israel's NEWtech, Novel Efficient Water Technologies, a program promoting the Israeli water technology sector, is an Israeli government initiative that allocates substantial resources towards strengthening the foundation of the water technology cluster and promoting its capabilities worldwide. From water treatment and security to desalination and drip irrigation, Israeli companies have used Israel's more-than-sixty years of water management experience to provide solutions to many of the world's water needs. Oded Distel, director of NEWtech told the website Israel21c.net, “NEWtech is a focal point for all entrepreneurs and companies in Israel, which gives them different tools in marketing and helps them through various phases in R&D.” Companies affiliated with NEWtech have developed water-related solutions in Rumanian villages, Chinese cities, Turkish fish farms, South African fields and even under the streets of Moscow. “There are tons of smaller companies with very advanced technologies,” Distel adds. “We are seeing a lot of people from IT and healthcare software taking their technologies and bringing them to the water world.”

As the world's water needs continue to expand, and global warming threatens an ever-dwindling water supply, Israel is helping to do its part and share the “treasure” of water around the world. ■