

JULY 13, 2009

Parashat Matot-Masei

Carrots and Sticks

V'im lo ya'avru chalutzim itchem – “and if they do not pass over, armed, with you” (Numbers 32:30)

As the Israelites travelled through the desert, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh saw the lush fields on the eastern bank of the Jordan River and requested to keep that land in place of their portion in the Promised Land. The two and a half tribes promised that before they would return to their new homes on the eastern bank of the Jordan, they would first help the nation conquer Canaan. However, in laying out the agreement Moses added a negative incentive, “If they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possession among you in the land of Canaan.” (32:30) How does receiving a portion of the Land constitute a punishment? Netziv explains in his commentary Ha'amek Davar that had the eastern land not been given to these tribes, the entire nation would have divided it equally. But now, “as a fine, Moses stipulated that if they failed to cross over in arms then they would only inherit their portion of the Land of Canaan, and on the eastern bank of the Jordan they would inherit nothing.”

Netziv's explanation of Moses' agreement with the tribes provides a clear example of a “carrots-and-sticks” approach to problem solving, which rewards positive steps and punishes negative actions. This very same approach is now being used by the Obama administration to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear program.

Recently, the United States used “sticks” to pressure the Islamic Republic. The Treasury Department imposed financial sanctions on an advisor to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and on an Iraqi Shiite terrorist group with links to Hizballah, Agence France Presse reported. According to a Treasury statement, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis serves as an advisor to Qasem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds Force, the arm of the IRGC responsible for providing support to terrorist organizations committed to Israel's destruction.

President Obama explained the strategy in December, “We need to ratchet up tough but direct diplomacy with Iran... and present a set of carrots and sticks in changing their calculus about how they want to operate. In terms of carrots, I think that we can provide economic incentives that would be helpful to a country that...is under enormous strain, huge inflation, a lot of unemployment problems there...But we also have to focus on the sticks...we may have to heighten up those sanctions...and ultimately let them make a determination in terms of whether they want to do this the hard way or the easy way.”

Moses' use of a “carrots-and-sticks” approach to problem solving proved effective as the nation ultimately united to conquer the Land. As the U.S. continues with this approach to Iran, let us pray that the Islamic Republic will soon recognize that its best interests are served by accepting the “carrots” and abandoning its nuclear program. ■

Spiritual Borders

Zot ha'aretz asher tipol lachem – “This is the land that will fall to you” (Numbers 34:2)

The Torah specifically defines the borders of Israel that the Jewish people were to inherit and conquer. Yet, it would seem logical that the borders of Israel would be self-evident. Anything that they conquered would be the Land, and anything they did not conquer would not be the Land. Why does the Torah specify the borders? Rashi (on 34:2)

explains that the Land has two different dimensions – national and spiritual. While the people may have conquered more or less territory than the borders outlined in the Torah, Rashi clarifies that “many commandments apply in the Land which are not practiced outside the Land.” For this reason, the Torah defined the spiritual borders of Israel within which these unique commandments would apply.

In delineating the spiritual borders of the Land of Israel, the Torah established the unique relationship which exists between the Land and the Jewish people. Despite the thousands of years that have past since then, this special connection remains.

While some Israel critics in the Middle East have stated that the Holocaust was the reason for the establishment of the modern State of Israel, there is much more to the story of Israel than the persecution of Jews. Without a doubt, the Holocaust convinced much of the world of the urgent need to establish a Jewish state. However, the urgency of Israel’s establishment and the timing of its creation must not be confused with the Jewish people’s deep historical roots in the Land of Israel. The Jewish connection to Israel is rooted in thousands of years of history beginning with the inheritance and division of the land in the book of Numbers. While there has been a continuous Jewish presence in the Land since the time of Joshua, the goal of Zionism was to reestablish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel and to reconnect to the place which we have kept in our hearts, dreams and prayers throughout our history as a people. For more on the historic connection of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, click [here](#).

The Holocaust highlighted the urgency of a Jewish homeland, but our connection to the Land of Israel began thousands of years earlier with the division of the Land in the desert. While we often think about Israel in terms of physical borders, we should also remember that the Land has spiritual borders as well – which underscore the special relationship between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. ■

Free to Roam

Eileh masa’ei Benei Yisrael - “These are the travels of the children of Israel” (Numbers 33:1)

Many commentators struggle with the listing of the Israelites’ travels in the desert. Why does the Torah provide a seemingly irrelevant record of unimportant journeys in the desert? Midrash Tanchuma (Masei: 1) suggests that the Torah does not highlight the travels because of the different locations, but rather to emphasize the protections which God provided the Israelites and the development of the nation. “Said God to Israel...see how many miracles and wonders I performed for you...how many enemies attacked you, and I did not flee from you; how many snakes and scorpions did I remove from your path?” The ability to travel helped the Israelites to finally coalesce into a unified nation which was capable of developing a productive society in the Promised Land.

In noting the ability of the Jews to move unimpeded, the Torah connects the capacity to travel and the improvement of the nation. Nowadays, Israel has been able to increase the Palestinians ability to travel and help them to develop their economy, the cornerstone for a Palestinian state.

According to a recent Reuters report, Israel said that it would allow a crossing between the West Bank and Jordan to remain open 24 hours a day to help the Palestinian economy. “The prime minister has ordered an immediate and significant extension of opening hours of the Allenby Bridge crossing for imports and exports in order to increase business activity and improve the lives of Palestinians,” an official statement said. Nazmi Mhanna, Director of Border Crossings in the Palestinian Authority (PA), said a 24-hour commercial schedule would “increase the volume of exports and imports, which will boost the economy.” The expanded operating hours of the Allenby Bridge joins the removal of 140 roadblocks and eight central checkpoints over the past year.

Israel’s decision to extend the operating hours of the Allenby Bridge reinforces the Jewish State’s commitment to bolster the PA and create an environment for a lasting peace. Hopefully, like the Israelites in the desert, this ability to travel will help the Palestinians develop the basis upon which they can establish a peaceful society. ■