

JUNE 1, 2009

## Parashat Nasso

### Trust in Relationships

**Ish ish ki tisteh ishto – “If any man's wife goes aside” (Numbers 5:12)**

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The story of the *sotah* chronicles a relationship mired by subterfuge and distrust. Tradition teaches that the *sotah* was not simply a victim of unwarranted suspicion who was subjected to the whims of a jealous and overzealous husband, but rather her repeated engagement in suspect behavior aroused that suspicion. While the Torah describes the husband as being “jealous of his wife” (Numbers 5:14) the Talmud (Sotah 3a) explains that the husband of a *sotah* must explicitly warn her in the presence of witnesses not to act in an untrustworthy manner. It is only after the wife ignores this warning and continues her inappropriate behavior that she can be subjected to the painful ritual described in the text. Thus, it is only because her inappropriate actions did not improve that her husband was forced to resort to the *sotah* ritual to discover the truth.

The *sotah* ritual was only conducted when a wife carried out such suspicious behavior that there was little ambiguity as to her true deeds. Similarly today, Iran’s unambiguous behavior has raised little doubt as to the true intent of the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program.

Despite Iran’s insistence that its nuclear program is designed to generate electricity, the actions of the Islamic Republic are consistent with those of a nation developing nuclear weapons. For eighteen years Iran operated a clandestine nuclear program that came to light only when an Iranian opposition group exposed hidden nuclear facilities in Iran. Such a secretive effort, especially for a nation that is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, is inconsistent with a peaceful agenda. Additionally, Iran recently test fired a solid-fuel missile with a range of about 1,200 miles, far enough to strike Israel, parts of Europe and U.S. bases in the Middle East, the Washington Post reported. In a triumphant speech, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad linked the missile launch with Tehran’s nuclear program. “In the nuclear case, we send them a message: Today the Islamic Republic of Iran is running the show,” Ahmadinejad said. For more on Iran, please visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).

Iran’s claim that its nuclear program is intended to produce electricity is simply not credible. Like the *sotah*, Iran’s actions have generated the distrust and concern that the world must now vigorously address. ■

### Prerequisite to Peace

**Yevarechecha Adonai v’yishmerecha – “May the Lord Bless you and keep you” (Numbers 6:24)**

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Rashi interprets the first section of the *birkat Kohanim* to be a blessing for the protection of wealth. S’forno, however, wonders why the first section should be so base as to deal with money, as opposed to a loftier or more spiritual blessing. Why must this be the first blessing? S’forno answers with a dictum from Ethics of the Fathers, (3:17) “If there is no flour, there is no Torah.” While we might idealize lofty aims and spiritual values, without the “flour” necessary to sustain ourselves we will never actualize our goals. For this reason the Kohanim bless us first and foremost with prosperity. Once we enjoy financial security, we can begin to focus on our less immediate, but no less important, spiritual goals and needs.

S'forno's interpretation of the *birkat Kohanim* emphasizes the importance of financial stability as a necessity for personal growth. Nowadays, this concept is a key element of Israeli attempts to achieve peace with the Palestinians.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu advocates a peace process based on a three-pronged approach including talks, security cooperation and development of the Palestinian economy. Convening the Ministerial Committee on Improving the Situation of the Palestinian Residents of Judea and Samaria, Netanyahu noted that advancing economic projects for the Palestinian population would improve the Palestinians' quality of life and personal welfare. Defense Minister Ehud Barak presented economic projects in the Palestinian Authority, including the establishment of several industrial zones, environmental protection projects and the establishment of a new Palestinian city near Ramallah. In addition, a new Israeli-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce opened this year under the auspices of the Peres Center for Peace. The chamber, which will work to assist its members to develop business contacts and commercial relations, already hosted a successful initial meeting in February. The chamber also recently held its inaugural gala dinner in Tel Aviv which was attended by dignitaries including former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. At the event Blair spoke of a three-tier vision of economics, politics and security for both Israelis and Palestinians, adding that the economic dimension is critical for peace. "Economic growth and enterprise could play their part in the realization of [peace] aspirations," he told delegates.

Or, to paraphrase S'forno, "if there is no flour there is no peace." The Israeli policy underscores their belief that in order for the Palestinians to end the conflict, they must achieve economic stability. ■

## The Value of Consensus

### Vayaviyu et korbanam - "And they brought their offering" (Numbers 7:3)

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Many find Nasso to be a challenging *parashah* not only due to its length (179 verses), but also its repetitiveness. The Torah devotes large swaths of text to delineating each prince's gifts to the Tabernacle, despite the fact that each leader gave exactly the same gifts. Why does the Torah describe each gift twelve times? Why not relate the gift once and then simply explain that each prince offered the identical gift? The Torah devotes a large portion of text to detailing the gifts of each prince in order to highlight the beauty of these gifts. Out of respect for one-another the princes of each tribe agreed in advance to offer identical gifts and thus, the Torah describes each gift in detail to draw attention to the unity underlying the gifts – which was their most beautiful characteristic.

The gifts of the princes highlight the importance of agreement and understanding – attributes recently witnessed during a meeting of the U.S. President and the Israeli Prime Minister. In citing their numerous points of agreement, the leaders highlighted the strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

In their recent meeting, President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu easily pointed to the many areas in which they concur. Both leaders agreed that a nuclear Iran must be prevented and that talks with Iran must have a timeframe. Both leaders committed to pursue peace between Israel and the Palestinians as well as between Israel and the entire Arab world. Finally, both leaders committed to work closely together to achieve these objectives. In order to do so the two heads of state have established working groups where they can voice their perspectives on these issues. Speaking to the press about dealing both with the Iranian threat and the Palestinian issue, Netanyahu said "I think we actually – we don't see closely on it, we see exactly eye to eye on this – that we want to move simultaneously and then parallel on two fronts: the front of peace, and the front of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear capability." For more on the Obama-Netanyahu meeting, click [here](#).

The recent meeting between American and Israeli leaders serves to highlight the goals which our nation shares with Israel. Like the gift of the princes, these shared goals represent accord and harmony – and the beauty of the U.S.-Israel relationship. ■

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