

SEPTEMBER 7, 2009

Parashat Netzavim-Vayelech

Shared Consequences

Atem netzavim hayom kulechem – “You are standing this day all of you” (Deuteronomy 29:9)

Our *parashah* includes a second covenant between God and the Jewish people. What was the difference between the covenant on Gerizim and Eival and the covenant made at Sinai? Kli Yakkar (on verse 9) explains that during the ceremony on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival the nation established a covenant of *areivut* – mutual obligations – which was different than the covenant at Sinai which represented personal obligations. Kli Yakkar further opines that *areivut* means shared consequences, and explains that in rabbinic literature the word *arev* connotes a cosigner on a loan. “Any cosigner who sees the borrower wasting his money – he will rebuke him for fear lest he be forced to pay in his place.” Therefore, this new covenant utilized the idea of shared consequences to reinforce the covenant of Sinai, ensuring that the ancient Israelites understood the shared consequences of ignoring the rules of their society.

The world could learn from Kli Yakkar’s example of the *arev*’s shared consequences. The international community must recognize that if Iran fails to meet its obligations, and cease its illicit weapons program, we will all suffer the shared consequences of a nuclear-armed Islamic Republic.

While a nuclear-armed Iran would constitute an existential threat to Israel, it would also threaten the interests of the United States and peaceful nations around the globe. A nuclear Iran would likely lead to nuclear proliferation elsewhere in the Middle East, fundamentally altering the strategic balance in a region that is already one of the world’s least stable. Furthermore, emboldened by a nuclear arsenal, Iran could seek to extend its radical foreign-policy agenda by strengthening its support for terrorist beneficiaries like Hamas and Hizballah. Such proxy groups would have much greater success in their efforts to destabilize pro-Western Arab states because an Iranian nuclear umbrella would intimidate moderate governments and give freer reign to those extremists seeking to radicalize the population. Finally, by combining a nuclear weapon with its ballistic missile program – already capable of targeting American troops in the Middle East and parts of Europe – Iran also would pose a serious nuclear threat to the United States and its allies. To learn more about Iran, please visit <http://www.aipac.org/Iran>.

Some in the international community realize the threats that a nuclear Iran would pose to their own safety and security, and have begun implementing sanctions designed to stop Iran’s nuclear program. Like the *arev* described by Kli Yakkar, these nations’ efforts ultimately stem from the unity founded in shared consequences. ■

Sins of Omission

V’haniglot lanu u’levanenu – “The revealed things belong to us and to our children” (Deuteronomy 29:28)

According to the Torah, Moses stated that there are “revealed things” which are our responsibilities and “hidden things” which remain in the domain of God. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 43b) explains that Moses used this strange terminology to instill the Israelites with a sense of mutual obligation and responsibility to enforce the strictures of the Torah. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (commentary on Deuteronomy 29:28) said that, “this duty of solidarity...is limited to...what is openly or omitted to be done in public, the responsibility for which is shared by everyone whose

influence might have prevented the sin of commission or omission being done.” Thus, according to the Torah, the entire community had a responsibility not just to follow the directives, but also to ensure that the community did not commit “sins of omission” by ignoring or forgetting the rules dictated in Bible.

Like the Israelites’ obligation to prevent sins committed by omission, today we must be wary of the willful omission of historic events from educational curriculums, particularly Hamas’ refusal to recognize the facts of , or teach Gazan children about, the Holocaust.

During the same week that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu received the Axel Springer publication of the original plans for the Auschwitz and Birkenau extermination camps, Hamas leaders have vociferously refused to allow Palestinian schoolchildren to learn about the Holocaust in a United Nations educational program about human rights. The Washington Post reports that “‘Talk about the Holocaust and the execution of the Jews contradicts and is against our culture, our principles, our traditions, values, heritage and religion,’ said Jamila al-Shanti, a Hamas legislative official. His remarks came a day after Hamas spiritual leader Yunis al-Astal said teaching children about the murder of 6 million Jews during World War II would be ‘marketing a lie.’ He characterized the possible introduction of the subject into Gaza schools as a ‘war crime.’” Abdul Rahman el-Jamal, head of Hamas’ education committee in Gaza, made a similar claim to the BBC, stating that the Holocaust was a “big lie” and that “to teach it would be to ‘grant a big favor’ to Israel, which has been fighting Hamas for years.” For more on Hamas, click [here](#).

In an era where Holocaust denial is used to undermine Israel’s legitimacy, the world should see Hamas’ efforts for what they are. Every nation bears the shared responsibility to rebuff any attempt to erase the historical truth of the Holocaust. It is only by avoiding such a sin of omission that we can ensure that the horrors that Hitler perpetrated on the Jewish people are never repeated. ■

Physical Leadership

Vayelech Moshe – “And Moses went” (Deuteronomy 31:1)

After delivering his speech to the children of Israel, why did Moses feel the need to go anywhere? If he had more to say he could have easily called the nation back to him. Why did he physically bring his words to the Children of Israel? Chizkuni (on verse 1) explains that Moses made the extra effort, on the very day of his death (see verse 2), to bring a message of reassurance to the nation and instill in them a sense of confidence in Joshua’s leadership. Through his actions Moses demonstrated a critical quality in leadership. When the future of a nation is at stake, a leader must be willing to physically take the necessary steps to ensure stability, growth and prosperity.

Moses’ dramatic deed of walking through the Jewish camp was an incredible physical act of leadership. Nowadays, the State of Israel has also taken remarkable physical actions as it continues to demonstrate its desire for peace.

In recent months, Israel has undertaken important measures in hopes of creating an environment which will lead to peace with its neighbors. In addition to taking significant risks by dismantling outposts and removing checkpoints and roadblocks, Israel has also invested in the Palestinian infrastructure and economy, leading to significant economic growth and improvements in the quality of life in the West Bank. Israeli leaders have also committed to taking further steps for peace. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly said that he is ready to travel “to Damascus, to Riyadh, to Beirut, to any place” to meet with Arab leaders to discuss ways to end the conflict. Arab nations must now reciprocate by taking similar steps, such as granting Israeli planes over-flight rights. Moreover, Arab leaders must find the courage to implement transformative acts, such as former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in 1977, which would make obvious a sincere commitment to peace.

Moses’ actions demonstrate that at any time, even on the last day of his life, a leader must be willing to take the physical steps necessary to ensure a better future. While Israel’s leadership has committed to such deeds, now is the time for Arab leaders to reciprocate. ■

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