

APRIL 6, 2009

Shabbat Chol Ha'Moed Pesach

A Hand and an Arm

B'yad chazakah u'vezroah netuyah – “With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 26:8)

During the Passover Seder we recite the quote from the Torah that the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt “with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm.” “A mighty hand” refers to divine strength and the ability to extract the Jewish nation from Egypt by force, yet to what does “an outstretched arm” refer? While many commentators interpret the phrase as a variation on the theme of force, it can also be understood in the exact opposite manner. An outstretched arm symbolizes cooperation – a hand extended in hopes of a warm reception, as in the numerous times that Moses appeared before Pharaoh to negotiate for the nation’s release. Thus, “a mighty hand, and an outstretched arm” can be understood to refer to Moses’ dual approach to freeing the nation from the Egyptians: the outstretched arm of negotiations and the mighty hand which was ultimately used to free the Israelites.

Today, the United States is using a similar dual track approach to engagement with Iran. By combining the “outstretched hand” of diplomacy with the threat of increased sanctions, “a mighty hand,” the United States hopes to convince the Islamic Republic to abandon its nuclear program.

In a recent interview, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that American diplomatic overtures to Iran would be more effective if coupled with stringent economic sanctions, Reuters reported. “Perhaps if there is enough economic pressure placed on Iran, diplomacy can provide them an open door through which they can walk if they choose to change their policies,” Gates said. “I think the two go hand in hand, but I think what gets them to the table is economic sanctions.” While the administration has reached out to Iran, hoping to dissuade them from pursuing nuclear weapons, to date top Iranian officials have dismissed U.S. overtures, saying dialogue could not begin until the United States removed its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, severed its ties with Israel and met a series of other preconditions. As the administration continues to try to engage Iran diplomatically it must also maintain the threat of economic penalties if Iran continues to defy U.N. Security Council demands by refusing to stop enrichment activity.

Just as the Israelites were redeemed with a “mighty hand and an outstretched arm” so too must America commit itself to dual tracks of engagement with Iran. Hopefully, Iran will choose the outstretched hand of peace and avoid imposing any further sanctions on its own people. ■

Hearing the Knock

Kol dodi dofek – “The voice of my beloved knocks” (Song of Songs 5:2)

The woman in the fifth chapter of Song of Songs hears the knocks of her long-lost love, however, having just retired to bed she is slow to wake up. By the time she finally comes to her senses and rushes to open the door her beloved has already gone. (5:5-6) Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in a 1956 essay entitled Kol Dodi Dofek, likens these knocks to a divine call to the Jewish nation to respond to the miraculous rise of the modern State of Israel. He states that there were six knocks: the U.N.’s recognition of Israel, the victory in the War of Independence, the theological implications of a Jewish government in Israel, Israel as a counterforce to assimilation, Israel putting the power of self-

defense in Jewish hands and Israel as a refuge for persecuted Jews. Each of these knocks was a signal to the global Jewish community to awaken, rise up, and take action to support the young State of Israel.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's allegory reminds us that unique events call for each of us to "hear the knocks," awaken and take action. Nowadays, as Israel faces unparalleled threats to her very existence, we must continue to "hear the knocks" and respond to these existential threats with critically needed support.

Israel is finding it increasingly expensive to keep pace with military challenges ranging from an Iran seeking nuclear-weapons capability to terrorist groups like Hamas and Hizballah. Spiraling defense costs are forcing Israel to spend more on defense as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) than any other nation in the industrialized world. Israel is spending eight percent of its GDP on defense, or nearly double the percentage the United States spends. However, the actual costs to the Israeli economy are much higher, when one takes into account lost productivity and the need for reserve duty, internal security and anti-terrorism spending. To help meet this challenge the House of Representatives approved \$2.38 billion in security assistance for Israel as part of the fiscal year 2009 omnibus spending package. Combined with the \$170 million included in a supplemental appropriations bill passed last year, the new spending package fully funds the first year of a ten-year, \$30 billion U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). For more information on the importance of U.S. aid to Israel, click [here](#).

While Congress has decided to fund the first year of the MOU, it must continue to approve each subsequent year's assistance as part of the annual foreign aid bill. Each of us must continue to "hear the knock" and rise up to let our members of Congress know just how critical U.S. aid to Israel really is. ■

Connecting Through Music

Vayomru leimor ashirah - "And they said, I will sing" (Exodus 15:1)

Following the nation's miraculous escape at the Sea of Reeds, the Israelites burst into song. Although a song of poetry, the grammar teaches us an important lesson about the power of music. The Jewish nation sang as a group, yet they began their song in the singular: "I will sing..." Why did they not instead begin with "we will sing?" Ohr Hachayim explains that "They gave praise in song without paying heed to difference and separation [between them], until they were like one person. And even though they were many, since they focused together and did this they said, 'I will sing' in the singular form as if they were one person." Thus, Ohr Hachayim reminds us of music's ability to unite different people from unique and varied backgrounds into a single unit.

Despite differences between individual musicians, the universal language of music can bridge societal gaps and coalesce a diverse group into a unified entity that sings as one. It is in this vein that musicians from Israel and Jordan have come together to create an international, inter-religious musical group focused on peaceful coexistence.

Professional peacemaker Lee Ziv hopes to connect people in the Middle East through music. Ziv and Jamil Sarraj, who run creative workshops in Jordan, have created a new musical group, Musaique, to bridge cultural divides and unite people in peace through music. "In many instances, Israeli Arabs who are Muslim, Palestinians, Bedouins, Christians and Israeli Jews already play music together in Israel, but not under a banner for peace, but as a natural form of cooperation as professional music makers," the website Israel21c reports. "Musaique, on the other hand, will emphasize the peacemakers' dialogue created by way of the music. It will be a homegrown effort, initiated by the people who come from the region." To date Ziv has collected over 40 musicians from across the Middle East to participate in the project. As she succinctly states, "We want to bring people who love music and who want to do work on interfacing through music."

The unifying effect of the music at the Sea of Reeds transformed a band of slaves into a single nation. Nowadays, musicians hope to mimic that ancient success and harness the bonding power of music to bring peace to the people of the Middle East. ■