

JULY 6, 2009

Parashat Pinchas

Enduring Harassment

Ki tzorrerim heim lachem – “for they harass you” (Numbers 25:18)

In *parashat* Pinchas, God commands Moses to pursue the Midianites because they “harass you by their wives which have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi...” (Verse 18) While we know about the past Midianite attempt to destroy the Jewish nation through sinful coercion, Kli Yakkar notes an ambiguity in the wording of the text which belies future attacks. “The language of ‘harass’ (in the present tense) requires explanation, [both for its ambiguity, and] because it implies that the Midianites continued to harass them. Perhaps God knew what was in the hearts of the Midianites; that their anger [at the Jews] had not subsided and they continued to harass – devising new and devious way to perpetrate evil, in perhaps even a manner worse than the original damage.” Thus, the Midianite harassment included not only past attacks, but also the planning of even greater and more potent attacks in the future.

Like the Midianites who harassed the Israelites in the past and planned future assaults, Hizballah has also struck out at Israel in the past, and based on new evidence, continues to plan attacks against the Jewish people.

United Nations (U.N.) peacekeepers recently uncovered some 20 Katyusha rockets that were ready for launch in southern Lebanon, The Jerusalem Post reported. The rockets were revealed as United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) observers stepped up their operations and began entering villages in search of Hizballah weapons caches. The Iranian-backed terrorist army has rebuffed U.N. Security Council demands to disarm and, with the help of Tehran, has dramatically expanded its arsenal to include some 42,000 rockets capable of striking most Israeli population centers. This arsenal, which Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has said “dwarfs the inventory of many nation-states,” is nearly three-times the size of Hizballah’s stockpile before the 2006 war with Israel. Given Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s declarations that the group “will wage war [against Israel] without any preconditions,” and that “the disappearance of Israel is an inevitable fact,” the U.N. must step up its inspections of Hizballah-controlled territories in Lebanon. This is the prescription dictated by U.N. Resolution 1701 which states that UNIFIL should “take all necessary action ... to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind.”

Unless UNIFIL takes greater action to reign in Hizballah in Southern Lebanon, the terrorist army will continue to follow in the footsteps of Midian. As Kli Yakkar stated, when they “harass” Israel the next time it may be “perhaps even a manner worse than the original damage.” ■

The Finest Flour

Solet minchah belulah bashamen – “fine flour for a meal-offering, mingled with oil” (Numbers 28:12)

Most commentators understand the *solet*, which is mentioned numerous times in the Torah, to be the finest flour available. What type of flour was that? A clue is given when the Mishnah (Avot 5:15) describes different types of memory, and likens one kind of mental acuity to “a sieve, which removes the flour but collects the *solet*.” On this Mishnah, Rabbi Ovadia Bartenura explains that this *solet* refers to the “thick flour, which is [most] valuable, from

which the whitish flour is sifted out, leaving the valuable *solet*. This is what they would use for meal offerings.” However, Saadia Gaon (Leviticus 2:1) disagrees and identifies *solet* as “white flour free of impurity.” Clearly, the *solet* was the most valuable part of the wheat but there continues to be a dispute as to whether that was the fine, white flour or the whole grain flour.

While we can never definitively know which type of flour the *solet* refers to, a recent Israeli study conclusively demonstrates that if we were to choose the most valuable flour today, whole-grain would definitely be the winner.

A landmark study by Dr. Michael Shechter of Tel Aviv University’s Sackler School of Medicine and Sheba Medical Center’s Heart Institute, which was recently published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, demonstrates how simple carbohydrates like white flour increase the risk of heart disease. The Jerusalem Post reports that scientists used brachial reactive testing, employing an arm cuff to visualize arterial function in real time, to examine the inside of the students’ arteries while they ate a variety of foods. “We knew high-glycemic foods were bad for the heart. Now we have a mechanism that shows how,” says Shechter. “Foods like cornflakes, white bread, french fries and sweet drinks all put undue stress on our arteries. We’ve explained for the first time how high-glycemic carbohydrates can affect the progression of heart disease.” Shechter advises avoiding simple carbohydrates as much as possible in favor of low-glycemic foods like oatmeal, fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts.

While we may never identify the *solet* of the past, today’s *solet* – the finest flour available – must be the flour that not only nourishes, but also contributes to a healthy lifestyle. Thanks to the doctors at Tel Aviv University, we now know that that flour is whole-grain. ■

True Leadership

Ish al ha’eidah - “A man over the community” (Numbers 27:16)

According to the Torah, when defining the appropriate qualities for his successor Moses asked God to appoint a “man over the congregation.” What did Moses mean by this unusual phrase? Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk explains that on one hand Moses wanted God to appoint a “man among men; a man and not an angel; a man and not a zealot burning with the fiery passion of Pinehas.” On the other hand, this “man of the people” would still need to be “over the community, exhibiting exemplary personal behavior and attitude, so that his words would be heard and his actions would serve as a model for emulation.” Thus, using Moses’ words as a guide, the ideal Jewish leader engenders followers not by force, but through his words and deeds. Such a true leader would lead by example and never need to impose his will on his followers.

When we contrast the leadership described by Rabbi Menachem Mendel to the coercion of the Iranian regime, we see that by violently imposing itself on its own citizens the Iranian leadership has called its own legitimacy into question.

Recently Iran’s Guardian Council formally certified the re-election of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, saying there was no validity to charges of voting fraud, The New York Times reported. Earlier in the day, apparently in an attempt to create a semblance of fairness, Iranian state television said that the Guardian Council had begun a random recount of a limited number of ballots. However, the recount results served only to arouse skepticism as Iran’s official news agency said that in one district Ahmadinejad actually won even more votes than he had in the first count. The announcements sparked scattered protests in Tehran which were violently dispersed by Iranian security forces. Since Iran’s elections on June 12, Iranian authorities have carried out mass arrests and violently cracked down on dissenters in the streets, reportedly killing nearly two dozen protesters.

Instead of seeking the valid support of his constituents, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continues to impose his own version of the election results on Iran, squashing any dissent with brutality and cruelty. Moses’ message reminds us that while Ahmadinejad may emerge from this sordid election as Iran’s president, he is certainly not a “man over the congregation.” ■