

JUNE 15, 2009

Parashat Shelach

Economic Security

Uma ha'aretz...hayesh bah etz im ayin – “And how is the land ...is wood therein, or not” (Numbers 13:20)

Before sending the twelve spies into the land of Canaan, Moses lists a series of questions about the Land that the spies were to answer. Of all the inquiries, the instruction to identify whether the land is “fat or lean, are there trees there or not,” seems the strangest. While it is easy to understand some of the other information that Moses required, such as whether the inhabitants of the Land lived “in camps or in strongholds,” what is the significance of whether the land is fat or has trees? S’forno explains that in asking about the trees and fat of the Land Moses was actually asking the spies to report on the economic viability of Canaan. Moses realized that prosperity brings security and he knew that if the people were to conquer the land but lack the ability to sustain themselves, they would never be able to establish themselves in the Land.

This concept of security through prosperity is a notion which has remained true throughout the ages. Currently, as Israel works to achieve peace with the Palestinians, the Israeli government has internalized this idea and is making efforts to ease Palestinian travel and promote the economic prosperity which could lead to peace.

According to a new Israeli report on supporting Palestinian capacity building, “Israel recognizes the importance of international support to projects in the West Bank in the areas of economic development, capacity building and the security and civil sectors...Israel supports efforts by the international community to promote Palestinian development.” In order to help facilitate such projects and increase economic prosperity in the West Bank, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) recently removed two roadblocks in the Ramallah area. The IDF also said it would man an additional West Bank checkpoint around the clock so as to permit Palestinian passage 24 hours a day. According to the IDF, the removal of the roadblocks “joins the opening of some 140 barriers that were removed over the past year.” In addition, the army said it “informed [the Palestinians] that in the coming days, it intends to implement a series of steps that could significantly improve life for Palestinians.” As Israel demonstrates its commitment to peace, there are a number of immediate steps the Palestinians and the Arab states can take to show a true commitment to ending the Arab-Israeli conflict. For more on these measures, click [here](#).

Just as Moses realized that economic prosperity and security go hand-in-hand, so too does Israel understand that a strong Palestinian economy will help establish the means for resolving the conflict. As Israel demonstrates its commitment to peace, other nations of the region must also reciprocate in order to help end the hostilities. ■

Respecting Covenants

Asher ayin b’ayin nirah – “that You were seen eye-to-eye” (Numbers 14:14)

Following the sin of the spies, the Torah relates that God intended to destroy the Jewish people and create a new nation consisting solely of Moses’ descendants. As Moses frantically argued to save the nation, he described the relationship between God and the Jewish people by noting that “You were seen eye to eye before them.” Why does Moses emphasize this aspect of their relationship in his bid to save the people? Kli Yakkar (on verse 20) suggests that this is a *remez* – a mystical hint in the Torah. The word *ayin* can also be read as the letter *ayin*, which carries the

numerical value of 70. Kli Yakkar elaborates that the Torah has 70 valid interpretations, and that Moses' use of the phrase *ayin b'ayin* was a reference to the Israelites acceptance of the Torah at Sinai. Therefore, Moses actually argued that because the Israelites had accepted the Torah, and in doing so entered into an unbreakable covenant with God, that God should spare the nation.

When Moses referenced the covenant at Sinai he underscored the importance of honoring one's side of a contract. Unfortunately, in modern times not all parties feel the need to honor their commitments. Today, this is true of Iran, who despite being a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), continues to disregard its obligations under the agreement.

According to the United Nation's (U.N.) nuclear watchdog, Iran has sped up its production of nuclear fuel and has increased its number of installed centrifuges to 7,200 – more than enough to make fuel for two nuclear bombs per year, the New York Times reported. “The facts on the ground continue to change,” said Gary Milhollin, director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, “and not in our favor.” According to a new International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report, Iranian authorities are also blocking U.N. atomic inspectors from visiting a heavy-water reactor capable of being modified to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. The report also said Iran has refused to answer questions about alleged research on nuclear warhead design. Despite signing the NPT, and receiving all the benefits inherent in the treaty, Iran has disregarded its obligations and continues its rapid advancements towards a nuclear weapons capability. To learn more about Iran's nuclear program, click [here](#).

The Israelites were ultimately spared due to the binding covenant of Sinai. As the IAEA report demonstrates, the Islamic Republic does not feel the need to honor their agreements in such a way, and instead is working to achieve the antithesis of what the NPT stands for. ■

The Destructiveness of Negativity

Vayilonu al Moshe v'al Aharon - “They complained against Moses and Aaron” (Numbers 14:2)

While the negative report of the spies prompted doubt within the nation, it was the attitude of the Israelites that ultimately led to the 40 years of wandering in the desert. The nation easily accepted the deception of the spies because the people could not see the bounty of the Land themselves, and thus they permitted the spies' pessimism to define their reality. Fundamentally, the Israelite's cynicism and lack of faith prompted their fall. Once their negativity diminished their ability to conquer the land, their fate in the desert was sealed.

Just as the Israelites cynicism created an environment which blinded them to the benefits of the Land, Arab countries in our day demonstrate a similar negative attitude which blinds them to the benefits of working with Israel.

The Obama administration and Israel's government are looking to the Arab world to play a positive role in facilitating Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. However, the recent Arab summit in Doha, Qatar proved a bitter disappointment on this front. Arab leaders not only backed terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, but they also embraced Sudan's outlaw President Omar al-Bashir – only days after the International Criminal Court issued a warrant for his arrest on charges of genocide in Darfur. Ironically, even as the summit ignored the warrant for al-Bashir, the final summit declaration called for Israel's prosecution in international courts for its defensive operations in Gaza. Perhaps the most telling aspect of the Arab summit was the final document's call for “all Arab countries to reconsider its economic and political relations with Israel and all kinds of normalization.” To facilitate peace efforts between Palestinians and Israelis, Arab states must begin to prepare their own people for peace with Israel by recognizing Israel's right to exist, ending their decades-old boycott of Israel and opening diplomatic and economic ties with Israel.

Yet, before the Arab states can make strides towards achieving peace, these countries must first eliminate their underlying negativity towards Israel. Like the pessimism that prompted the tragedy in the desert, Arab cynicism towards the Jewish State has prevented them from seeing the many positive aspects of Israel. ■

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