

MAY 10, 2010

Parashat Bamidbar

A Peaceful Purpose

Se'u et rosh kol adat... – “Take the sum of the entire congregation...” (Numbers 1:2)

Much of our *parashah* relates the counting of potential soldiers and the organization of the Jewish nation into a camp capable of conquering the Land. However, according to S'forno, when the nation went to war it abandoned the camp formation as it rushed to confront the enemy. How then was the camp's formation designed to help the Jewish people conquer Israel? S'forno (on 1:2) explains that the camp's organization was designed to be a symbol of strength, “each according to his flag without [need for] war; rather, the nations would turn away from them.” Thus, the camp formation, rather than being a tactical arrangement, was a strategic configuration designed to display the Israelites' military capability and deter nations from attacking them as they passed through on their way to the Land of Israel.

The Israelites' camp formation was designed to demonstrate their strength and prevent unnecessary conflict. Today, this same strategy is employed by the state of Israel. By maintaining a qualitative military edge, Israel seeks to deter adversaries from attacking the Jewish state.

During a recent speech, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said that “Hezbollah may now have as many as 45,000 rockets of various types, some of which could hit targets across most of Israel.” Yet, Barak added that in his opinion the Iranian-backed militia group is still well-deterred by Israeli military power. This statement underscores the fact that dissuading attacks from those who wish to harm the Jewish state is an important tenet of Israel's defense strategy.

Unfortunately, Israel is forced to spend a greater percentage of its gross domestic product on defense than any other industrialized country in the world—almost double what the United States spends. That is why U.S. security assistance to Israel is so important. In addition, U.S. aid to Israel also helps the United States. Israeli battlefield use of American equipment and shared know-how has helped the United States improve both its equipment and tactics. Israel has also shared its cutting-edge defense technologies with the United States to help protect our troops and improve their performance. Moreover, by law, 75 percent of U.S. aid to Israel has to be spent in the United States, thus boosting America's defense industry. For more on U.S. security aid to Israel, click [here](#).

U.S. support for Israel deters conflict by making it clear that Israel cannot be defeated militarily. Like the camp formation of the Israelites in the desert, this projection of strength ultimately serves a peaceful purpose. ■

Obligations of Leadership

V'itchem yihyu ish ish lamateh – “And with you will be a man from every tribe...” (Numbers 1:4)

Why were princes appointed from each tribe to stand with Moses as he conducted the census? Midrash Lekach Tov suggests that the selection of an individual leader was designed to honor that person, and by extension, “in order to give greatness to each tribe.” However, Midrash Hagadol offers a different explanation: “So that if the [people] sinned, their punishment would rest [on the shoulders of the prince] who could have objected but did not. For anyone who can object and does not, is held accountable for that sinful behavior.”

In explaining why the princes were selected, Midrash Hagadol distinguishes between being a leader and exhibiting leadership. Today, the new head of the International Atomic Energy Agency seems to understand this distinction.

Yukiya Amano, the new chief of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), recently rejected Iran's claim that international inspectors have no right to ask questions about Tehran's missile technology and warheads research, *The New York Times* reports. "The IAEA's function is to provide adherence, confidence, that all the activities are for peaceful purposes," said Amano. "And in order to make sure that all the activities are peaceful, we need to know whether there are nuclear activities with military dimensions." Amano's comments come following a speech by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who stated that "The agency has no right to intervene in the missile program of any country...What does that have to do with the purview of the agency?" Amano's leadership is imperative to the efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. By confronting Iran's failure to live up to its obligations under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, the IAEA is exposing the Iranian claim—that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes—as a deception. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Yukiya Amano seems to understand that for his organization to be effective, he must focus on the aspects of leadership described by Midrash Hagadol. Hopefully, this leadership will help bring Iran's clandestine activities to light, and center the world's attention on preventing the Islamic Republic from acquiring nuclear weapons. ■

Righteous Role Models

Ish al diglo b'otot – "Every man with his own flag, according to the signs" (Numbers 2:2)

What image was displayed on each tribe's flag? While Rashi suggests that each flag bore a unique color, Ibn Ezra argues that the flags displayed the symbols of the tribes: a lion for Judah, an ox for Ephraim and so on. However, Chizkuni disagrees, explaining that the word *b'otot* refers not to signs, but to *otiot*—letters. According to this view, the first flags had the letters *alef, yud, yud*, the second had *bet, tzadik, ayin*, the third *resh, het, kuf*, and the fourth *mem, kuf, bet*. In this way, when combined, the letters spelled out the names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. By spelling out their names on the flags, the Israelites demonstrated the Jewish people's aspiration to live up to the spiritual heights of our forefathers.

Glorifying ideals by publicly displaying the names of people who lived their lives in pursuit of those principles remains a common practice today. However, if naming streets after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in America speaks to our pursuit of racial equality, and naming streets after Eliezer Ben Yehudah in Israel reflects the Zionist dream of Jewish renewal, then the Palestinian Authority's (PA) practice of naming public places after terrorists indicates a much darker ideal.

During a recent Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs press briefing, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon spoke about the extent of Palestinian incitement. According to Ayalon, "We see the glorification of terrorism by naming and calling public places, squares and buildings on the most hideous terrorists, whether it's Yehya Ayash, who's responsible for hundreds of deaths of Israelis, and not just Israelis, also foreigners, Americans and others, or Dalal Mughrabi, who was responsible of the murder of 38 people, including 16 kids." Ayalon was specifically referring to the recent naming of a street in Ramallah after Ayash, a Hamas bomb-maker who orchestrated numerous bombings throughout Israel, and the recent naming of a public square in al-Bireh in honor of Mughrabi, who led one of the most devastating terror attacks in Israel's history. While the PA claims to seek peace with Israel, teaching Palestinian children to honor murderers instead of peacemakers undermines the peace process, and ultimately helps to inspire a new generation of terrorists.

The Israelites in the desert used their flags to pay homage to the Jewish people's greatest spiritual role models. Now, if the PA truly wishes to end the conflict and usher in a lasting peace, they must stop presenting terrorists as role models, and instead start honoring Arab leaders, teachers and clerics who promote peaceful coexistence. ■