

MAY 24, 2010

Parashat Beha'alotecha

Powerful Protection

V'anan Hashem alehem – “And the cloud of God was upon them” (Numbers 10:34)

Rashi notes that in addition to the six clouds that protected the Children of Israel from every direction, a seventh cloud scouted their future travel route. Yalkut Shimoni provides a vivid description of how the clouds functioned: “Said Rabbi Eliezer ben Pedat in the name of Yossi ben Zimra: When Israel would travel, the Ark [of the covenant] traveled ahead of them; there were two sparks of fire emanating from between the poles of the Ark, and they would consume the snake and scorpions in their path, and they would destroy the adversaries of Israel.”

While the nation of Israel no longer receives the divine protection of the clouds in the desert, thanks to continued American investment and support, the State of Israel will soon enjoy the protection of a new missile defense system.

By a 410-4 margin, the House of Representatives recently overwhelmingly backed President Obama's request for \$205 million for Israel's Iron Dome missile defense program. According to Reuters, “Iron Dome uses small radar-guided missiles to blow up Katyusha-style rockets with ranges of between 5 kilometers (3 miles) and 70 kilometer (45 miles), as well as mortar bombs, in mid-air.” Boosting Israel's investment in Iron Dome will help protect innocent Israelis under rocket, missile and mortar attack by terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hizballah and will enhance American security interests in the region.

According to House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA), “With nearly every square inch of Israel at risk from rocket and missile attacks, we must ensure that our most important ally in the region has the tools to defend itself.” Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) reinforced this sentiment, saying: “These violent militant groups...have fired thousands of missiles, rockets, and mortars against Israeli civilian targets...The U.S. must support our indispensable ally, Israel...” For more on U.S.-Israel defense cooperation, click [here](#).

American support for Israel's Iron Dome missile defense program helps ensure that while the clouds of the desert no longer exist, the type of protection which they offered continues to keep innocent Israelis safe from those who wish to do them harm. ■

A Desperate Decoy

V'yehi ha'am k'mitonenim... – “And the people took to seeking complaints...” (Numbers 11:1)

While the Torah tells us that “The people took to seeking complaints,” the text never reveals the substance of their protest. Rashi (on 11:1) explains that the Torah is vague about the specific grievance because the subject of the complaint was beside the point, “The title ‘murmurers’ [complainers] alludes to a language of a plot, [meaning that that complainers] searched for an excuse, looking for a way to separate from following the Lord.” Put simply, the Torah did not specify the Israelites' complaint because the complaint itself was a ruse meant to mask their desire to undermine Moses' leadership.

Like the complainers who used deception as a tool to make their plot to undermine Moses' authority seem valid, Iran is using deception in an attempt to lend legitimacy to its nuclear weapons program.

The United States, Europe and Russia responded with extreme skepticism to Iran's recent announcement that it had reached an agreement to ship roughly half of its nuclear fuel to Turkey. The deal, a watered-down version of a Western offer to ship nuclear fuel to France, does not require the Islamic Republic to suspend its efforts to enrich uranium, which the United Nations Security Council has demanded. In addition, Iran will only be required to ship half of its enriched uranium out of the country—leaving it with enough material to produce one nuclear weapon.

Fortunately, Iran's ruse is not working. Shortly after Iran announced the deal, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the five permanent, veto-wielding members of the U.N. Security Council—the United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia and China—and Germany have all agreed to a new draft Security Council resolution imposing additional sanctions on Iran. American and European officials said that the resolution could give them a legal basis for choking off financial transactions between Iran and banking centers in Europe and elsewhere. “The central bank remains the one major financial institution which officials have [identified] as being involved in Iran's illicit activity but has not yet been targeted,” said former U.S. Treasury official Matthew Levitt. “Closing that loophole would have a major impact on Iran's ability to finance its proliferation and other illicit activities.” Previous sanctions have taken aim at specific banks suspected of financing proscribed nuclear activity, but never anything as pivotal as dealings with the central bank itself. For more on Iran's nuclear program, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Like the plot of the complainers to undermine Moses' leadership, Iran's scheme to ship a relatively small amount of its nuclear material to Turkey is a desperate decoy. Now, to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, the U.N. Security Council should immediately pass and implement the new draft sanctions resolution. ■

Self-Inflicted Damage

Mi ya'achileinu basar – “Who will feed us meat?” (Numbers 11:4)

According to the Midrash, the mystical *manna* could taste like any food. Why then did the “mixed multitudes” complain that they yearned for the taste of meat? Netziv, in his commentary Ha'amek Davar (on 11:4), quotes the Talmud (Yoma 75a) to explain that only the righteous enjoyed the limitless taste of *manna*. Errant members of the nation had to grind the *manna* into flour, which they could then bake into bland bread. Therefore, the people who complained about the taste of the *manna* actually had the ability to improve it by simply changing their behavior.

Today, we see the Palestinian Authority (PA) perpetrating this same type of behavior. While the PA complains that Israel is not serious about negotiations, it is the PA itself who refuses to engage in the direct negotiations which will ultimately lead to an end of the conflict.

Israeli-Palestinian proximity talks mediated by the United States are a welcome first step back to the negotiating table. However, in order to reach a genuine and lasting peace these indirect talks should lead rapidly and unconditionally to direct, bilateral negotiations. Unfortunately, while Israel has taken a series of steps to foster such serious and direct negotiations, Palestinian leaders continue to insist on unrealistic preconditions. Their demands that Israel commit to withdraw to the 1949 Armistice lines or freeze all Jewish housing construction in Israel's capital are unrealistic, harmful conditions that would prejudice the final outcome of negotiations. Yet, the PA continues to claim that it is Israel who is insincere in its approach to negotiations. As Palestinian Presidential Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh recently stated, “The decision of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on continuing settlement activity in East Jerusalem proves that Israel continues to create obstacles to the peace process.”

While the PA claims that Israel creates “obstacles to the peace process,” by refusing to negotiate directly with Israel it is the PA who inhibits progress on the most important issues. Like the mixed-multitudes, whose behavior preempted their experiencing the wondrous taste of the *manna*, the PA has only itself to blame. ■