

JANUARY 25, 2010

## Parashat Beshalach

### The Necessity of Self Defense

**Va'chamushim alu Benei Yisrael – “and the Children of Israel went up armed” (Exodus 13:18)**

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Rashi presents two possible interpretations of the word *chamushim* in this week's *parashah*. First, based on Joshua 1:14 (“and you shall pass before your brothers armed”) Rashi states that the word means “carrying weapons.” He then adds another explanation based on the word *chamesh*, meaning “five.” Rashi explains that during the Exodus only one-fifth of the Jewish nation escaped from the “days of darkness.” In connecting these two interpretations Rashi understood that following the loss of 80% of their population the Israelites knew that they were vulnerable and could not afford to leave themselves unprotected. Thus, the Israelites realized the necessity of defending themselves and therefore “went up armed” (13:18).

By connecting the vulnerability of the depleted Jewish people with the crucial role of self-defense, Rashi reminds us of our obligation to defend fellow Jews. Bolstered by American aid, Israel continues to do just that.

On Israel's northern border Hizballah has armed itself with more than 40,000 missiles, three times the amount it had prior to the 2006 war. On Israel's northeastern border the Syrian military has embarked on a modernization effort and arms-buying spree not seen since the 1980s, purchasing more sophisticated anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles from Russia. Meanwhile, on Israel's southern border, Hamas continues to smuggle in more sophisticated rockets which are capable of striking Israel's population centers.

To counter these threats Israel must spend a proportionately greater sum of money on defense than any other country in the industrialized world. Israel spends eight percent of its gross domestic product on defense, nearly double what the United States spends. This sum would be even greater without American support. The United States is committed to Israel's qualitative military edge and is currently in the midst of a ten-year Memorandum of Understanding which pledges an average of \$3 billion in annual security assistance to Israel. Moreover, the Obama Administration has sought additional ways to ensure that Israel can defend itself. According to *United Press International*, “The U.S. Army is reportedly building up stockpiles of missiles, armored vehicles, artillery shells and other equipment in Israel that the Israelis will be allowed to use in an emergency.” For more on U.S. aid to Israel, click [here](#).

Storing American arms in Israel is just one more way in which the United States demonstrates its commitment to ensuring that Israel's military can meet even the most challenging situations. This practice also demonstrates America's commitment to Israel remaining *chamushim*—aware of its vulnerability, yet ready to defend itself. ■

### Passing Over to Help

**Shamu amim yirgazun – “The people have heard, they tremble” (Exodus 15:14)**

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Towards the end of *Az Yashir* Moses alludes to the impact of the splitting of the sea on neighboring nations. “The peoples have heard, they tremble; pangs have taken hold on the inhabitants of Philistia” (15:14). “Terror and dread fall upon them; by the greatness of Your arm they are as still as a stone; till Your people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over that You have gotten”(15:16). In its simple meaning, the destruction of the Egyptian army sent

shockwaves around the world. Hoping to avoid more destruction, Moses prayed that neighboring nations would yield and allow the Jewish people to pass through unimpeded.

However, read metaphorically, these verses could relate to Israel's life saving efforts following Haiti's devastating earthquake. The imagery from verse 15:14, of trembling and pangs, conjures in our minds the desperation of the disaster stricken Haitians during and immediately after the quake. Yet, whereas in ancient times "Terror and dread fall upon them...till Your people pass over," today the Jewish people do not pass away from the foreigners, but rush towards them with assistance.

Israel's efforts in Haiti mark a long tradition of the Jewish state sending immediate and advanced assistance to countries affected by natural disasters, including Sri Lanka, Turkey, El Salvador and India. Following the earthquake in Haiti, Israel sent teams of medical and rescue personnel and set up a fully functional field hospital that began performing life-saving surgeries almost immediately. Israeli doctors treated hundreds of injured Haitians, performed about 100 life-saving surgeries and delivered five babies. The Israeli hospital quickly developed a reputation among medical professionals on the ground as aid and supplies from other nations had been slow to arrive. "No one except the Israeli hospital has taken any of our patients," a Harvard doctor told CNN. CBS News called the Israeli field hospital "the Rolls Royce of emergency medical care." For more on Israel's humanitarian efforts in Haiti, click [here](#).

While Israel could not prevent the trembling and fear which Haitians have experienced in the wake of the devastating earthquake, Israeli assistance has brought comfort and support to those who need it the most. ■

## Dogged Determination

### Vayavo Amalek – "And Amalek came..." (Exodus 17:8)

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In order to avoid military confrontation, and the possible panic that might ensue, Moses led the Israelites towards the Promised Land on a decidedly indirect path. Yet, when we read of the battle with Amalek (17:8), we find no attempt at circumnavigation. Why did Moses not attempt to avoid confrontation with Amalek? Ramban (on 13:17) explains that Amalek's hatred for Israel was so great that no escape maneuver would have deterred them. "Even had they [the Israelites] turned around towards Egypt, it would not have helped for they [Amalek] would have attacked on the way." Thus, Moses recognized that there was no course of action which he could have taken which would have avoided Amalek's determination to confront the Jewish people.

Like Amalek, who displayed an unwavering determination to provoke and confront the Israelites, Iran has made obvious its own resolve to incite and attack the Jewish people.

Iran, the leading state sponsor of international terrorism, uses proxy groups such as Hizballah and Hamas to harass and kill Israeli civilians. Further, American intelligence agencies now suspect, contrary to a national intelligence estimate made public three years ago, that Iran never halted work on its nuclear arms program in 2003, *The Washington Times* reports. A nuclear Iran would be able to provide greater support for Tehran's terrorist proxies and could attempt to fulfill Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's vow to "wipe Israel off the map." Although Iran is rapidly progressing toward a nuclear breakout capability, international sanctions are hampering Iran's ability to conduct business abroad and to attract desperately needed investment for its energy sector. To reinforce these sanctions the House of Representatives recently passed the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act (H.R. 2914), a landmark piece of legislation that would limit Iran's ability to import and produce refined petroleum products. The Senate is now considering similar measures as part of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act (S. 2799). For more on this legislation, visit [www.aipac.org/TakeAction](http://www.aipac.org/TakeAction).

Amalek's determination to confront the Israelites ultimately led to the unnecessary suffering of Amalek. Nowadays, Iran's determination to confront the Jewish people could lead to further economic sanctions, and cause needless hardships to the Iranian economy. ■

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