



Sermon Tidbits

JULY 12, 2010

Parashat Devarim

Speaking to Leadership

That Moses spoke to all of Israel (Deuteronomy 1:1)

אשר דבר משה אל כל ישראל (דברים א:א)

Could Moses truly have spoken to the entire Jewish nation at one time? How could one man—especially a man almost 120 years of age—speak to a crowd of more than a half-million people? Kli Yakkar suggests that when the biblical text uses the term *B'nei Yisrael*, it alludes to the entire nation. But, when the text only mentions *Yisrael*, as we find in this verse, the word refers not to the entire nation, but just to the leadership. Therefore, from the nuance of the text we learn that in order to transmit both encouragement and rebuke to the people, Moses chose to speak through the leaders who were charged with carrying out his message. As Kli Yakkar writes, “For the obligation to rebuke the nation falls on the leadership; and if they fail...then the iniquities of the nation hangs upon them.”

Moses understood that in order to make his message effective, he needed to address the leaders, the people responsible for transmitting his words and ensuring that the nation carried them out. Today, we must follow Moses' example by focusing our energies on the leadership entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out the will of the American people.

Every American can help shape policy and opinion by getting involved in the political process. As Jews, this is not just an opportunity, but a responsibility. Pro-Israel activists are able to impact U.S. foreign policy toward Israel by taking their message to their elected leaders and building ongoing relationships with their Representatives. In order to have impact, year-round contact with members of Congress is necessary and should include visiting Representatives in their district offices, inviting them to the synagogue, organizing legislative missions to Washington, D.C. and enlisting the community to support key congressional initiatives. As Americans who are committed to Israel's security, we must take it upon ourselves to educate our elected officials and their staffs. We must act to ensure that our leaders understand the necessity of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship. For more information on how you can make an impact, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

Moses spoke to the leaders of Israel understanding that they were the people in position to implement his message. If we want to ensure the continued strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship, we must follow Moses' example and speak to our own leadership as well. ■

Setting a Positive Tone

The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb (Deuteronomy 1:7)

ה' אלקנו דבר אלנו בהרב (דברים א:ז)

Throughout the book of Deuteronomy Moses conveys a message of both encouragement and rebuke. On the one hand, Moses chastised the people for their errors in the desert, while on the other hand he urged the nation to rally, remain strong, and inherit the Promised Land. Yet, Moses opened his first address of Deuteronomy with a seemingly unrelated detail: Israel's receipt of the Torah. Why did he mention this seemingly irrelevant information? Chizkuni (on 1:6) explains that despite the seriousness of Moses' message, “he started with this fact to draw them closer with gladdening words.” In essence, Moses realized the true importance of how he presented his message. By starting off on an encouraging note, Moses created the goodwill necessary to convey his more serious message later on.

Moses used a positive tone to lead to substantive and constructive dialogue. During his recent meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Barack Obama followed suit when he opened his remarks by focusing on the shared values and strong bond between the United States and Israel.

In their meeting, Obama and Netanyahu discussed a wide range of issues including ongoing negotiations with the Palestinians, the blockade of Gaza, and Iran's nuclear program. Yet, in his remarks to the press, Obama made a point to first accentuate the positive by reiterating the strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship. "The bond between the United States and Israel is unbreakable," said the president. "It encompasses our national security interests, our strategic interests, but, most importantly, the bond of two democracies who share a common set of values and whose people have grown closer and closer as time goes on." The United States and Israel face difficult challenges in confronting Iran and urging the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table. President Obama rightly set the stage for continued progress by highlighting the common interests and values that the United States and Israel share. For more on the recent meeting between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, click [here](#).

Moses opened the hearts of the people to constructive dialogue by first reminding them of the joyous experiences at Sinai before introducing the challenges they would face. President Obama wisely did the same by reiterating the strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship before discussing the challenges that the U.S. and Israel face together. ■

Effective Punishment

Also God was angry with me for your sakes (Deuteronomy 1:37) (דברים א:לז) גם בי התאנף ה' בגללכם

During his description of the sin of the spies, Moses added that he himself was also punished due to their failing. Yet, the text in Numbers clearly indicates that Moses' sin was unrelated to the spies' report, as he was punished for striking the rock at the waters of Merivah (Numbers 20:13). Why did Moses connect his punishment to the sin of the spies? Ramban (on 1:37) suggests that Moses was not blaming the spies. Rather, despite the fact that the sins were not connected, Moses linked his sin with theirs, "for he wished to mention together the punishment of all those prevented from entering the Land—for they were all resulting from their sins." Therefore, by highlighting the punishment that they all faced, Moses hoped to prevent the next generation from making the same mistakes.

Moses reminded the Israelites of his and their parents' shared punishment to prevent the Jewish people from suffering the same fate. In so doing, he demonstrated his understanding of how the threat of punishment, like sanctions against companies investing in Iran's energy sector, can ultimately compel good people to do the right thing.

The mere threat of sanctions has led most major international fuel traders to exit the Iranian market. Just days after Congress passed the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, France's Total, the last major western fuel trader dealing with Iran, announced that it would stop providing refined petroleum to Tehran, while South Korea's GS Engineering & Construction said it has called off a \$1.2 billion gas project in Iran. In addition, the *Financial Times* reports that Lloyd's of London recently announced that it is restricting its coverage of ships carrying petroleum to Iran in compliance with the newly imposed U.S. sanctions. Moreover, global energy company BP has stopped providing Iranian airlines with jet fuel in compliance with newly enacted U.S. sanctions. The sanctions are the toughest that Congress has ever passed against Iran and, if implemented in full, hold the last best hope of persuading Tehran to suspend its quest for nuclear weapons through political, economic, and diplomatic means. For more on how implementing these sanctions could prevent a nuclear Iran, click [here](#).

Moses' linking of his punishment with that of the spies ultimately proved effective as the Israelites avoided repeating their mistakes and successfully merited entering the Promised Land. Now, let us all pray that the sanctions which the U.S. recently passed against Iran will be fully implemented and be successful in convincing Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program. ■