

JULY 5, 2010

Parashat Matot-Masei

Keeping Our Commitments

Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes (Numbers 30:2)

וידבר משה אל ראשי המטות (במדבר ל:ב)

Why did Moses specifically single out the heads of the tribes to tell them about the laws of oaths and vows? Rabbi Moses Sofer, author of the halachic work *Chatam Sofer* (found in *Shivim Panim L'torah* on Bamidar, p. 181), explains that historically, communal leaders make promises to their constituents that they fail to fulfill. “For this reason, the warning is directed specifically to them: ‘He shall not defile his words; everything that emanates from his mouth he shall do’ (30:3).” Thus, Moses singled out the heads of the tribes in order to underscore the importance of leaders following through on their commitments.

Moses reminded the Jewish leaders that while their verbal declarations carried weight, in the end they also had to follow through on their promises. Similarly today, while the United States’ recent passage of far-reaching sanctions against Iran carries a strong message to the Islamic Republic, statements alone are not enough to convince Tehran to abandon its nuclear weapons program. Immediate implementation of these sanctions is critical.

Congress’ passage of the most comprehensive and toughest Iran sanctions legislation to date will—if implemented promptly and aggressively—dramatically increase the pressure on the Iranian regime to halt its illicit pursuit of nuclear weapons. The Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act, passed by the Senate 99-0 and by the House of Representatives 408-8-1, aims to stifle Iran’s energy sector, restrict Tehran’s ability to conduct international financial transactions, and hamper its ability to obtain components for its nuclear and missile programs. Quick implementation and strong enforcement by the president—who signed the bill into law on July 1—and his administration hold the last best hope of persuading Iran to suspend its quest for nuclear weapons through political, economic, and diplomatic means. For more on how implementing sanctions could prevent a nuclear Iran, click [here](#).

Moses reminded the Israelite leaders of the incredible importance of fulfilling their commitments and carrying out their promises. Now, our own government must heed this lesson as well and immediately implement the sanctions which offer the best hope of peaceably convincing Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program. ■

The Priority of Security

And our babies will dwell in fortified cities (Numbers 32:17)

וישב טפנו בערי המבצר (במדבר לב:יז)

The tribes of Reuben and Gad stated that they first needed to build fortified cities for their families, who would stay on the East Bank of the Jordan River, before they could help the nation conquer the Land of Israel. Why did they need to build these fortified cities first? According to *Ohr Hachayyim* (on 22:17), once the tribes of Reuben and Gad had the peace of mind of knowing that their children were safe and secure, “they could add another condition that they would not return to their families until they completely conquered the Land.” Therefore, secure in the knowledge that their families were safe, these tribes agreed to be away from their homes for the seven years of conquest, and then for the additional seven year period when the land was divided.

Like the tribes of Reuben and Gad, who understood that before they could take additional risks they must first ensure the safety of their families, the State of Israel realizes that in order to achieve peace with the Palestinians it must first ensure the security of its citizens. With this in mind, the United States Congress has demonstrated its strong support for Israel's right to self-defense and its naval blockade of Gaza.

Recently, more than three-quarters of the House of Representatives and the Senate signed bipartisan letters to President Obama that affirm America's support for Israel and call on the president to back its right to self-defense at the United Nations and other international organizations. The letters, which received 338 signatories in the House and 87 signatories in the Senate, also state that it is in America's "national security interest" to stand with Israel, and express support for Israel's right to self-defense in the wake of the Gaza flotilla incident. The House letter was led by Reps. Ted Poe (R-TX) and Gary Peters (D-MI). The Senate letter was spearheaded by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY). These letters demonstrate Congress' strong, bipartisan support for Israel and it is important that we thank our House and Senate members for signing them. To thank your Representatives, click [here](#).

The tribes of Reuben and Gad understood that the security of their families had to be their first priority. The United States understands that Israel must make its security a priority as well. After all, the more secure Israel feels, the more willing it is to take additional risks to achieve peace with its neighbors. ■

Modern Miracles

For an inheritance by lot (Numbers 36:2)

בנחלה בגורל (במדבר לו:ב)

The Torah's description of the division of the Holy Land seems to contain an internal contradiction. On the one hand, the Land was divided according to the size of each tribe. Yet, the Torah tells us that the division occurred "by lot." How could a random lottery properly divide the land? Rashi (on 26:54) explains that the lot itself had some divine help. "The names of the tribes were written on twelve slips, and the twelve portions were written on twelve slips, all mixed in the lottery. The prince [of a tribe] would insert his hand and remove two slips...the slip from his tribe and the slip for the boundaries destined for him, and the lottery itself would cry out and say, 'I am the lottery taken for such-and-such boundaries for this tribe!', as it is written, *al pi hagoral*, (literally) 'by the mouth of the lot' (26:54)."

In ancient times, the Israelites relied on miraculous help to ensure that the seemingly random lottery properly identified its owner and divided the Holy Land. Had they lived today, they would not have needed a miracle to ensure proper identification. Rather, they could have used an amazing new Israeli technology which was recently introduced by Microsoft.

At this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo Conference, which was held from June 15th to June 17th in Los Angeles, Microsoft unveiled its new Kinect gaming technology, which allows users to interact with their Xbox360 gaming consoles without a separate controller. "You are the controller," Mike Delman, Corporate Vice President of Global Marketing for the Interactive Entertainment Business told ABC News. Facial and voice recognition will allow users to log into their Xbox LIVE accounts without ever pressing a button. The underlying technology for Kinect emanates from Tel Aviv startup PrimeSense. The technology blog Engadget recently wrote that, "From Tel Aviv unknown to Xbox gaming wunderkind, PrimeSense has already had quite a run." As PrimeSense CEO Inon Beracha told Ha'aretz, "We are especially honored to have a partner like Microsoft who shares our vision in bringing innovative and engaging natural experiences to consumers."

In biblical times, divine intervention was required to automatically identify a prince holding a lot. To do the same thing today, all Microsoft needs is a camera and cutting-edge Israeli technology. ■