

JUNE 28, 2010

Parashat Pinchas

A Covenant of Peace

Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace (Numbers 25:12) *הנני נותן לו את בריתי שלום (במדבר כה:יב)*

What is the nature of the covenant of peace which the Torah states God gave to Pinchas? Chizkuni suggests that the term refers to an external covenant, a promise of safety and security that the relatives of Zimri and Kozbi would not attempt to exact revenge for Pinchas' act. Yet, Netziv, in Ha'amek Davar (on 25:12), understands the covenant to be a blessing for Pinchas' internal nature. While circumstances forced Pinchas to act violently, there remained a danger that his actions could permanently impact his inner nature. Netziv states that therefore, God granted Pinchas a covenant of internal peace "that he not be strict and not grow angry."

Like Pinchas, who was forced to result to violence and ran the risk of internalizing a strict and angry character, Israel could easily have developed visceral feelings of aggression, bitterness and hatred towards the people of Gaza following Operation Cast Lead. Yet, despite continued threats from the Hamas regime, Israel has chosen a path of peace—providing ongoing assistance to avoid a humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Since the end of Operation Cast Lead, when Israel's military used force to stop the daily firing of rockets and mortars at southern Israel, the Jewish state has facilitated the transfer of more than one million tons of humanitarian supplies to Gaza. The Israeli government has on average facilitated the entry of 220 tons of food to the coastal strip each day, 20 percent more than the amount recommended by the World Food Program. Israel has also maintained a corridor for the transfer of medical patients out of Gaza into Israeli hospitals and other foreign medical facilities. In 2009 alone, 10,544 patients along with 12,000 companions left Gaza. Now, the Israeli cabinet has decided to allow all goods to enter Gaza through Israel, except for a limited list of items that could be utilized by Hamas for military purposes. This liberalization of Israel's legitimate blockade, aimed at stopping the influx of arms and explosives that pose a threat to innocent Israeli civilians, comes despite Hamas' continued refusal to release captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who recently marked his fourth full year of captivity. For more on how Israel has eased the blockade of Gaza, click [here](#).

Despite the continued risks posed by Hamas, Israel has facilitated the transfer of civilian goods into the Gaza Strip. In suppressing a natural desire to punish the violence which has emanated from Gaza, and choosing the more difficult path of humanitarianism, Israel has chosen to follow the path of Pinchas, hoping to establish a covenant of peace. ■

Investing the Time

Take for yourself Joshua son of Nun (Numbers 27:18) *קח לך את יהושע בן נון (במדבר כז:יח)*

Why was Joshua chosen to succeed Moses as leader of the Israelites? Rashi (on 27:16) explains that while Moses hoped to appoint one of his sons as the future leader, God preferred Joshua instead, "because he never left [Moses'] tent." The Midrash (Yelamdeinu) outlines Joshua's high level of service: "He would rise early in the morning and remain in the meeting hall until late at night to rearrange the benches and straighten the mats." Because of his unwavering support, Joshua was the natural choice when the time came to appoint a new leader.

According to Rashi, when Moses faced the tough decision of choosing a successor, God instructed him to turn to his most trusted student whose presence and service made him the most logical choice. Nowadays, our elected officials

follow a similar course, turning to those whom they know and trust best. That is why we must develop personal relationships with our members of Congress and effectively advocate on behalf of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Members of Congress are expected to be experts on such a wide range of issues that they must depend on others, including their staff, to keep them informed on all of the matters that fall under their purview. This fact presents an excellent opportunity for members of the pro-Israel community to affect policy by educating our Representatives and their staffs about the value of the U.S.-Israel relationship. In order to make a difference, year-round contact with members of Congress is necessary and should include visiting members of Congress in their district offices, inviting them to speak in the synagogue, organizing synagogue missions to Washington, D.C. and mobilizing the community to support key congressional initiatives. Congregants should visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction to see the current Israel-related legislative agenda and to contact their members of Congress about these issues.

Joshua played a primary role in Jewish history because he invested the time and energy necessary to develop Moses' trust and faith. We must now follow his example by investing our time and energy to develop relationships that will influence the future of the U.S.-Israel relationship. ■

Global Responsibility

Thirteen young bulls (Numbers 29:13)

פְּרִים בְּנֵי בָקָר שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר (בַּמִּדְבָּר כ"ט:ג)

The Torah commands the Jewish people to offer an additional 70 sacrificial animals over the course of the Sukkot holiday. Why 70 animals? The Talmud (Sukkah 55b) explains that the Jewish people offered these sacrifices to “correspond to the 70 nations of the world.” According to the Mishnah (see Rosh Hashanah 1:2), on Sukkot God judges the world regarding water and the world’s water supply—and the planet’s sustenance for the coming year hangs in the balance. Therefore, rather than allow the nation to worry solely about its own needs, God instructed the Jewish people to act out of concern for the global community, and commanded the Israelites to offer sacrifices for the entire world to ensure sufficient water for all.

The commandment requiring the Jewish people to offer the 70 sacrifices in the Temple instilled a sense of global responsibility and obligation in the nation. Today, that same sense of global responsibility demands that the United States lead the world against Iran’s nuclear weapons program.

While a nuclear-armed Iran would constitute an existential threat to Israel, it would also destabilize the entire world. A nuclear Iran would likely lead to global nuclear proliferation while fundamentally altering the strategic balance of the Middle East. To counter this threat, the U.S. has played a central role in international efforts to stop Iran’s nuclear weapons program. Recently, these efforts have resulted in new sanctions. On June 9, the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran which strengthen an arms embargo on the Islamic Republic and impose financial and travel sanctions on specific individuals and companies involved in Iran’s nuclear and missile program.

The U.S. has built on the Security Council’s actions by overwhelmingly passing its own new Iran sanctions legislation. The [Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act](#) requires foreign financial institutions to choose between doing business with Iran or with the U.S. by imposing a mandatory sanction for any bank with ties to designated entities. Given the very high volume of international financial transactions in dollars, most banks need to have access to the American banking system. The act also penalizes those in Iran abusing human rights; prohibits U.S. contracts with companies providing Iran with technology to suppress freedom of speech; codifies and expands the ban on imports from Iran; and prohibits the export of nuclear goods, services or technology to countries helping Iran acquire a nuclear weapons capability. President Obama should sign and implement this legislation immediately upon its arrival on his desk. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Just as in ancient times, when the Jewish nation offered 70 sacrifices to ensure the well being of the entire world, the U.S. has demonstrated its global responsibility by working tirelessly to promote global security and ensure that Iran’s radical regime cannot endanger the safety of the world’s population. ■