



Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 9, 2010

Parashat Shoftim

Law and Order

Judges and officers (Deuteronomy 16:18)

שופטים ושוטרים (דברים טז:יח)

What were the roles of the *shoftim* and *shotrim* mentioned in our *parashah*? Rashi explains that the *shoftim* decided matters of law while the *shotrim* pushed the nation to follow the commandments. S'forno elaborates that they were role models for the nation: "With their [upright] establishment the masses are established, but with their denigration [so too are the masses] denigrated." Ultimately, the *shoftim* and *shotrim* provided a standard for law and order—without the *shoftim*, the *shotrim* could have run wild, creating a police state or a dangerous oligarchy. At the same time, without proper enforcement the judgments of the *shoftim* would have been meaningless.

Like the ancient Israelites, the international community also requires judgment and enforcement. While the United Nations (U.N.) has judged responsibility for the recent events on the Israeli-Lebanese border, it must now take strong action to enforce its own Security Council's resolutions to stabilize the area.

On August 3rd, during regular tree-trimming along the border, Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) snipers opened fire at Israeli officers monitoring the situation, killing one and gravely wounding another. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) quickly confirmed Israel's version of events and rejected false Lebanese claims blaming Israel for the provocation. Still, the troubling attack highlights UNIFIL's failure to enforce existing U.N. resolutions, most notably U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701—which ended the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and requires the disarmament of Hizballah. Since that time, in full presence of UNIFIL personnel, Hizballah has rebuilt its weapons arsenal and stockpiled up to 60,000 short and long-range rockets.

The United States and the international community must take action to strengthen and expand UNIFIL and demand that it act to prevent arms smuggling to Hizballah. The United States must also press the Lebanese government to enforce U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 and take meaningful steps to disarm Hizballah. If the LAF continues to cooperate with Hizballah, Washington must reevaluate its relationship with the Beirut government and the LAF—the recipient of significant American military aid. For more on why the LAF provocation demands a tough international response, click [here](#).

While the U.N. correctly placed blame for the attack on the LAF, judgment is not enough. It must also take on the role of the *shotrim* by enforcing the law. If they do not, and continue to allow Hizballah to stockpile weapons, they will render their judgment meaningless. ■

Peace through Environmental Cooperation

You shall not destroy its trees (Deuteronomy 20:19)

לא תשחית את עצה (דברים כ:יט)

In the commandment that forbids the Jewish army from cutting fruit trees, even in the field of battle, Sefer Hachinuch (Commandment 530) sees a far broader mandate: the commandment against *bal tashchit* (wasteful behavior). Included in this mandate is any wasteful activity, including "the destruction of a vessel or the [unnecessary] burning or tearing of an item of clothing." Explaining the spiritual roots of this commandment, the Chinuch writes that its

purpose is “to teach our souls to love the good and beneficial and cling to it, and through this goodness will cling to us...and this is the path of the righteous and people of action who love peace and rejoice in the goodness of people who bring them close to Torah.”

Following the Chinuch’s description of those who refuse to engage in wasteful activity as “people of action who love peace,” a group of Israeli Arabs and Jews have worked together to create a forum to examine and treat environmental hazards in the Galilee.

The Abraham Fund, a Jerusalem-based non governmental organization that works to promote equality and social inclusion for all Israelis, is hosting the Forum for Environmental Justice in an effort to combat environmental hazards. According to the website Israel21c, each month the forum brings together municipal leaders from the Jewish and Arab communities in the Galilee, encouraging them to find solutions to their shared problems of environmental waste and hazards. “The environment is a fantastic platform for cross-border or cross-municipality cooperation” stated Amnon Be’eri-Sulitzeanu, co-director of the Abraham Fund. “We took a shot and it was the right one. Right away Jews and Arabs were willing to cooperate on these environment issues because everyone realized that environmental hazards don’t recognize borders.”

Like the Chinuch, who described the refusal to waste natural resources as a path of peace, Jews and Arabs in Israel are using their shared concern for Israel’s environment as a platform for cooperation and mutual understanding. ■

Open to Inquiry

Then your elders and judges shall come forth (Deuteronomy 21:6)
(כא:ב)

ויצאו זקניך ושפטיך (דברים)

Most commentators associate the *eglah arufah* (a calf whose neck is broken) ceremony with the concept of communal responsibility. The elders of the city closest to the cadaver publicly proclaimed their innocence, as well as their obligation to safeguard the downtrodden, when they declared: “Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it” (21:7). Yet, Rambam sees a far more utilitarian purpose to the ritual—to bring out the truth. In the Guide to the Perplexed (3:40), Rambam explains that the purpose of the rite was “To reveal the murderer and destroy his blood. This is because most often the murderer was from the city adjacent to the cadaver...and when the elders assemble and bring the calf, more people will discuss the matter and perhaps the [mystery] will be revealed.”

Following this same line of reasoning, Israel recently agreed to participate in a newly formed United Nations (U.N.) panel established to investigate the events on board the Mavi Marmara.

In late May a group of violent activists, supported by known radical groups with connections to terrorism, organized a flotilla in an attempt to break Israel’s legal blockade of Gaza, established to prevent the import of weapons and other materials used in terrorist attacks. During the attempted seizure of one of the boats in the flotilla, a mob attacked Israeli soldiers and caused the Israeli Defense Forces to take action to rescue them. Tragically, nine lives were lost in the incident. Israel has already established its own independent panel to investigate the incident, headed by Retired Israeli Supreme Court Judge Jacob Turkel, which includes two foreign observers with vast experience in the fields of military law and human rights. In announcing its willingness to participate in the U.N. panel, Israel agreed to share the results of the independent commission’s findings with the international community. After speaking with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that “Israel has nothing to hide. The opposite is true. It is in the national interest of the state of Israel to ensure that the factual truth of the overall flotilla events comes to light throughout the world and this is exactly the principle that we are advancing.”

Like the *eglah arufah* ceremony, designed to reveal the truth by shining the bright lights of scrutiny on unpleasant events, Israel is conducting a full and impartial investigation of the entire episode surrounding the tragic loss of life on the Mavi Marmara. By sharing the results of its investigation, Israel has expressed its confidence that the world will see that the true intentions of the flotilla’s organizers were anything but peaceful. ■

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