



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 8, 2010

Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei

More than Words

Kol nediv lev – “As many as were willing-hearted” (Exodus 35:22)

The Torah describes those that contributed to the Tabernacle as *nediv lev*—“willing hearted.” This term combines the word *lev* (heart) with a form of the word *nedavah* (a gift) to imply generosity. The Talmud (Shavuot 26b) also derives a legal principle from this term: “How do I know [that one was legally bound to make a donation to the Tabernacle] if one only concluded to make the donation in his heart? This we can learn from the verse, ‘As many as were willing-hearted [i.e. gave in their hearts].’” Thus, if a person decided to contribute to the Tabernacle, even if that person never made an external or verbal commitment, that person was obligated to follow through on the resolution. Maimonides (Law of the Act of Sacrifices, 14:12) codified this passage as normative law, writing that “Even [if] he only decided in his heart [to give] but did not verbally speak, he nonetheless must follow through [on his intentions].”

The Torah’s usage of the term *nediv lev* underscores the importance of following through on our intentions. Nowadays, the managers of public pension funds in California should heed this message by actualizing the intentions of California’s citizens—and divesting from firms that do business in Iran.

More than two years ago the California State Legislature passed a law requiring the state’s pension funds—the California Public Employees’ Retirement System (CalPERS) and the State Teachers’ Retirement System—to divest over \$900 million in state funds invested in companies that do business with Iran. Despite the passage of the bill, which was signed into law by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2007, fund managers have yet to take any action to comply with the law and divest from the companies. While the CalPERS board reported to the California State Legislature that it “decided after careful consideration . . . to not divest shares at that stage, having regard to its overriding fiduciary duty,” Assemblyman Joel Anderson (R-San Diego), the author of the original bill, said he was not satisfied with the board’s decision. “You have completely thumbed your nose at the Legislature,” he told CalPERS officials at a recent hearing. Other states, including states with large economies such as Florida, have already followed through on the wishes of their citizens, divesting their funds from companies which do business in Iran—with minimal losses to their plans. For more on state divestment from Iran, click [here](#).

The citizens of California have spoken clearly, demanding that the funds dedicated to secure their future not be used to support Iran’s nuclear aspirations. Like the *nediv lev*, the managers of California’s pension funds must now translate the people’s good intentions into action and begin implementing California state law. ■

Weaving Work

Asher nasa liban otanah – “...whose hearts stirred them up in wisdom...” (Exodus 35:26)

Moses needed people with varying skills to do the work necessary for the completion of the Tabernacle, including expert weavers. In addition to the regular “wise-hearted” weavers (35:25), the Torah notes the contributions of a specific subset of women “whose hearts stirred them up in wisdom [and who] spun the goat hair” (35:26). What was unique about these weavers? S’forno (on 35:26) quotes an opinion in the Talmud that these weavers wove the goat hair while it was still on the animals. Why? The women believed that removing a material from its source “slightly

diminishes its quality” and therefore took the special step of weaving the hair while still attached to the goat, using their special skill to ensure the highest quality material was used in the construction of the Tabernacle.

Following the example of these special skilled weavers, an Israeli company is importing its unique weaving technology to a new plant in North Carolina—creating many new jobs in the process.

Israeli textile manufacturer Shalag, headquartered in Kibbutz Shamir, recently announced plans to build a \$17 million textile plant in Oxford, North Carolina. Many international companies already incorporate Shalag’s non-woven textiles into diapers, baby wipes and other products, however, as Shalag manager Ilan Pickman said, “...our share in the North American market is quite small. Our intention is to grow by making this plant there. It will be easier to make and sell our supplies locally.” According to Israel21c.com, the company will be hiring 42 workers when the new plant opens at the end of 2010, and will expand to up to 100 employees in the next few years. Not only will Shalag be providing a much needed economic boon to this community, but the company also intends to pay above-average salaries in the hopes of hiring highly skilled workers who will be able to learn the complicated technological aspects of their jobs and stay for the long haul.

Jewish women in the desert used their unique knowledge and skills to produce material of superior quality for the Tabernacle. Similarly, Israeli companies are importing their unique technological skills to struggling American communities, providing Americans with both superior products and badly needed economic growth. ■

Leading by Example

V’hanesi’im heivi’u et avnei hashoham – “The princes brought the onyx stones” (Exodus 35:27)

Rashi (on 35:27) notes the stark contrast between the princes’ donation towards the construction of the Tabernacle and their gift at its consecration. Wrongly assuming that there would be a shortage in public donations, the princes promised to donate last. For this reason, at the consecration of the Tabernacle the princes stepped forward to contribute first. Yet, Rabbi Shalom Valk (See Ma’ayan Hashavua on Shemot, page 528) notes that in the textual description of the princes’ gift the word *hanesi’im* appears in a truncated form, implying a shortcoming in the princes’ actions. What was their mistake? Rabbi Valk suggests that the princes’ inadequacy was their failure to lead when donating to the Tabernacle—noting that true leaders do not wait for others to fall short. Rather, they should have been proactive in their generosity, making every effort to lead by example.

In the drive to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, the U.S. must not replicate the mistake of the princes and wait for the world to act. Instead, the U.S. must lead by example and impose its own enhanced sanctions on Tehran.

In a recent meeting between American and Israeli defense chiefs to discuss the diplomatic efforts to impose sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said both sides had agreed that the time had come to tighten sanctions on Iran. Meanwhile, Reuters reports that “Gabon’s U.N. [United Nations] Ambassador Emanuel Issoze-Ngondet, president of the Security Council for March, said the Iranian nuclear issue was not on the agenda of the 15-nation panel this month. ‘Right now we are waiting. We’re following the process that’s ongoing. We’re waiting for the right time to bring the Security Council to deal with it.’”

However, as Iran continues to increase its capacity to enrich uranium there is no time to wait. Just last month the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) released a report which declared that the agency has evidence of “past or current undisclosed activities” by Iran’s military to develop a nuclear warhead. The IAEA also said that Iran managed to make a minute amount of near 20% enriched uranium—a level which brings the Islamic Republic nearer to the capability of making fissile warhead material should it opt to do so. To convince Tehran to abandon this track Congress should immediately reconcile the House of Representative’s and the Senate’s Iran sanctions legislation in order to send a final bill to the president to sign into law. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

While international sanctions remain a critical tool to pressure Iran to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons, we cannot wait for the U.N. to act. The United States must learn from the error of the princes and lead by example. ■

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