

MAY 16, 2011

Parashat Bechukotai

Labor of Love

If you walk in My statutes (Leviticus 26:3)

אם בחקתי תלכו (ויקרא כו:ג)

Rashi (on 26:3) famously explains that the phrase “walk in God’s statutes” means that we should “toil in the Torah.” Why does God wish for us to “toil”? Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, in his work *Michtav M’Eliyahu* (Vol. 3 p. 13), explains that the greater the effort one invests in an endeavor, the more connected they become to that specific pursuit. For example, when a person toils to plant a tree and expends effort to raise it, he becomes attached to that tree and its life, until he begins to love it. “The reason for this is that when a person invests his energies into it, he sees in the tree a portion of himself...so he is connected to it.” The Talmud echoes this sentiment, stating that “a person prefers one measure of his own [produce] over nine measures of his friend’s” (Baba Metzia 38b).

We must remember this maxim as we work to support the U.S.-Israel friendship. The more effort we invest—and encourage our elected officials to invest—in sustaining this relationship, the more robust all of our support becomes.

By sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm for strong ties between the United States and Israel, your relationship with an elected official could play a pivotal role in determining the future of the Jewish state. A single vote could be the difference between Israel receiving billions of dollars in [defense aid, or losing its qualitative military edge](#). Yet, as we see in our own lives, building relationships is not always easy. This is especially true with busy members of Congress, and success requires patience and perseverance. It demands that we “toil.” While making one phone call or writing one letter to our representatives makes a difference, building a true relationship comes from meeting with members of Congress in their local offices, visiting them in Washington, D.C., and encouraging them to visit Israel and speak in the synagogue about their support for Israel. Not only do these meetings help our representatives understand the importance of the [strategic partnership](#) between the two countries and the significance of Israel to their constituents, but they also deepen our representatives’ commitment to Israel’s well being.

Rashi reminds us that the more we work for a cause, the more attached we become to it. As such, if we invest our energy in developing relationships with our elected officials, we not only make America and Israel stronger, but our toil also helps our representatives deepen their ties to Israel’s security. ■

Standing Tall

And I will make you go upright (Leviticus 26:13)

ואולך אתכם קוממיות (ויקרא כו:יג)

The verses of blessing in our *parashah* conclude with the divine declaration, “I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you go *kommemyut*.” What does the word *kommemyut* actually mean? The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 12:6) explains that the word means “upright, without fear of any creature.” Thus, the entire phrase represents God’s promise that during times of divine presence, the Jewish people will stand tall, unafraid of those who threaten our well being. The authors of a number of prayers in Jewish literature borrowed the strange word from this verse. In *Ahavah Rabbah*, the final blessing before the morning Shema, we read that God leads us *kommemyut*—upright—to our land. The authors of the Prayer for the State of Israel also utilized this word to state that we pray for God to gather the exiles of Israel to the Land, *kommemyut*—“standing tall.”

Since the dispersion of the Jewish nation from the Holy Land almost two millennia ago, Jews have prayed not only to return to the Land of Israel, but to do so standing tall, with a sense of pride and in absence of fear. Today, the state of Israel is a source of strength and resilience, determined to stand tall in the face of forces that threaten her existence.

That determination was at the heart of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent speech at a special ceremony in honor of the victims of terrorism. These victims and their families, like the land they call home, are a symbol of strength in the face of continued threats. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), Netanyahu spoke of some of the most recent terror victims in Israel, including the members of the Fogel family who were slain in their home, and teenager Daniel Viflic who was killed by a Hamas missile fired at his school bus. "The terrorist are trying to inflict fear, to break the Israeli spirit and to drive citizens out of their country," Netanyahu declared. "Our response has always been to refuse to give in to that fear..." In a speech that same day honoring Israel's fallen soldiers, Netanyahu spoke to the core of the *kommemyut* concept, [saying](#): "Thanks to our fallen loved ones we can stand up tall; thanks to their sacrifice our existence is guaranteed."

Even as we remember those who have paid the ultimate price defending the Jewish state, Israel continues to stand tall, ready to protect herself and Jews the world over. In fact, while biblical commentators translate the word *kommemyut* to mean "upright," in Modern Hebrew the word carries a powerful, different meaning: independence. ■

Burying Our Heads in the Sand

And if you shall reject My statutes (Leviticus 26:15)

ואם בחקתי תמאסו (ויקרא כו:טו)

Our aversion to the *tochechah*—the section of rebuke outlining the calamities that would befall the nation should they abandon God and the Torah—is ingrained in Jewish practice. In fact, in many synagogues the *tochechah* is read in a low voice at a brisker than normal pace, without interruption. Chafetz Chaim (see his commentary *Biur Halachah* on *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 428) lamented the fact that some communities opted to skip reading the Torah on this Shabbat altogether: "This is a mistake from the outset. Do they think that because they do not read the Torah and do not wish to look at the rebuke that they are assured that the [curses of the] rebuke will not befall them? This is like a person whose friends tell him not to walk down a certain path filled with pits and holes, and he tells them, 'I do not fear the openings, for I have a blindfold, and I'll cover my eyes that I not see them...' Is there a greater foolishness than this? Quite the opposite! The tighter he closes his eyes, the greater the potential damage he brings upon himself."

As unpleasant as we might find the *tochechah*, we must never allow ourselves to ignore it. Rather, we read it to remain aware of the dangers of spiritual indifference. Similarly, we cannot allow ourselves to overlook Iran's progress in developing nuclear weapons, lest we wake up one day to find ourselves in a more dangerous world.

While the international community has been focused on the Arab uprisings across the Middle East, Iran has been proceeding with its nuclear program. According to the [Mehr News Agency](#), "Iran says it will be able to produce all the nuclear fuel needed to run the Tehran research reactor by the end of March 2012." The report also indicates that "over 40 kilos of the fuel for the Tehran reactor has been produced inside the country and the remaining 80 kilos will be produced by the next Iranian New Year (March 20, 2012)." As the leading state sponsor of international terrorism, a nuclear-armed Iran would pose unacceptable threats to the United States and its allies. It would likely lead to nuclear proliferation elsewhere in the region while fundamentally altering the strategic balance of the Middle East, a vital region for U.S. national security interests. Iran could also share its nuclear technology with anti-American terrorist groups to carry out attacks against U.S. assets worldwide. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Too many members of the international community are ignoring Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, focusing exclusively on other issues instead. Sadly, this is a detrimental policy. Just as ignoring the *tochechah* is as foolish as walking through a minefield with a blindfold, ignoring Iran's nuclear progress is a recipe for disaster. ■