

SEPTEMBER 12, 2011

Parashat Ki Tavo

Dangerous Goals

An Aramean tried to destroy my father (Deuteronomy 26:5)

אַרְמִי אֵבֵד אֲבִי (דְּבָרִים כו:ה)

Quoting from our *parashah*, the Passover Hagaddah instructs us to “Go out and learn what Laban the Aramean wanted to do to our father Jacob, for Pharaoh issued a decree against the male children only, but Laban wanted to uproot everyone, as it is written, ‘An Aramean tried to destroy my father...’” When did Laban try to destroy Jacob? While no direct evidence exists, Ra’avan, in his commentary on the Hagaddah, deduces Laban’s intentions from another text. When Jacob and his family fled from Laban’s home, Laban chased after them. He told his son-in-law, “It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt; but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying: Take heed that you speak not to Jacob either good or bad” (Genesis 31:29). Ra’avan explains that were it not for God’s intervention, Laban would indeed have destroyed Jacob and his family.

While divine intervention prevented Laban from actualizing his desire to destroy the Jewish people, we cannot depend on a miracle to prevent Iran from gaining the tools to destroy the Jewish state.

As the world focuses its attention in the Middle East on Syria and Libya, Iran is rapidly advancing its nuclear program. [CNN](#) recently reported that the International Atomic Energy Agency “is increasingly concerned about the possible existence in Iran of past or current undisclosed nuclear-related activities involving military-related organizations.” The nuclear regulatory agency also announced that Iran was using new, more advanced centrifuges that will enable it to produce nuclear fuel much faster. The United Nations Security Council also recently “denounced Iran’s failure to abide by United Nations resolutions demanding an end to the possible weaponization of its nuclear program,” [Haaretz](#) reported. In a recent op-ed in [The Washington Post](#), Sallai Meridor, Israel’s former ambassador to the United States, wrote that “While the world might be looking elsewhere, the Iranians have boosted the production of enriched uranium, upgraded the level of enrichment closer to weapons-grade and are reportedly moving essential production aspects to a well-protected underground facility.” For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

When Laban expressed his plans to “wipe Jacob off the map,” God intervened. As Iran expresses a similar desire, the world cannot count on divine intervention; we must lobby our members of Congress to make sure that our government enforces the sanctions that can prevent Iran from achieving its horrible goal. ■

Avoiding Obligations

And I also gave it to the Levite (Deuteronomy 26: 13)

וְגַם נָתַתִּיו לְלוֹי (דְּבָרִים כו:יג)

Jewish law requires farmers in Israel to relinquish a significant portion of their produce to the priests and Levites. Yet, a nuance in the law exempts produce that entered the home not through a main gate, but in an unusual manner through another entrance. The Talmud (Berachot 35b) laments that some people used this loophole as a means to shirk their moral responsibility. “Come and see—the later generations are not like the earlier ones. The earlier generations brought in their produce through the main gate so that they would be obligated to tithe. Later generations brought in

their produce through fields, roofs and enclosures to exempt themselves....” While technically legal, the Talmud criticizes these efforts to avoid fulfilling ethical obligations.

Unfortunately, exerting great efforts to avoid one’s moral obligations is not relegated to the pages of ancient history. Today, the Palestinian Authority (PA) consistently takes great pains to avoid direct negotiations with Israel, finding any way of circumventing sitting down at the negotiating table to find a way to live in peace with their neighbors.

The PA has long publicized its intention to unilaterally declare statehood at the 66th session of the United Nations, which opened the week of September 4th. These efforts at the U.N. signal the PLO’s rejection of the principle of solving the conflict through direct negotiations with Israel. As Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian representative to the U.N., stated, even “if we succeed in opening the door for negotiations, we’re not going to stop from attaining what belongs to us as Palestinians in this General Assembly starting on September 20.” Moreover, PA President Mahmoud Abbas clearly stated in a May 16th *New York Times* [op-ed](#) that the admission of a Palestinian state into the U.N. is not part of a strategy to solve the conflict, but a way to perpetuate it. Abbas wrote that recognition of a Palestinian state by the U.N. “would pave the way for the internationalization of the conflict as a legal matter, not only a political one. It would also pave the way for us to pursue claims against Israel at the United Nations, human rights treaty bodies and the International Court of Justice.” Despite strenuous efforts by the Obama administration to convince Abbas not to go the U.N. route and return to the negotiating table, Abbas has repeatedly rejected American efforts and reaffirmed his commitment to avoid talks. *The New York Times* reported that following a meeting with Belgian Prime Minister Yves Leterme, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said: “Unfortunately, for over two and a half years, the Palestinians have done pretty much everything in their power to avoid such direct negotiations.” For more on the Palestinian U.N. statehood bid, click [here](#).

While the PA claims a strong desire to end its conflict with Israel, its actions clearly indicate otherwise. Like the ancient generations of Jews who did everything in their power to avoid tithing their produce, the PA has done its best to avoid serious, meaningful negotiations with Israel and the chance to give their own people a lasting peace. ■

Walking in God’s Footsteps

And walk in God’s ways (Deuteronomy 28:9)

והלכת בדרכיו (דברים כח:ט)

Rather than viewing the phrase “and walk in God’s ways” as good advice, many authorities consider this verse to be one of the 613 commandments, instructing us to follow in the ways of God. What specifically does this entail? Rabbi Yosef Albo, in his *Sefer Ikkarim* (essay 3, chapter 29) writes that we must follow God’s ways of kindness. “Just as God is compassionate, so must you be compassionate...just as God performs acts of kindness, so too you must perform acts of kindness.” Paraphrasing the Talmud (Sotah 14a), this verse commands us to clothe the naked, visit the sick and bury the dead, as well as perform other acts of kindness in our quest to emulate the ways of God.

Our commitment to acting with kindness towards our fellow man is one of the most basic tenets of Judaism. Through a new partnership with France, Israel has reaffirmed its commitment to this fundamental Jewish ethic.

Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently announced the formation of a new partnership with France aimed at aiding Haiti and emerging African states. The agreement, which includes joint actions in the fields of agriculture and irrigation, and public health and gender, will be implemented through MASHAV, Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation. The partnership will focus on sending experts, counseling, professional training and other services, appropriate to the needs, desires, and specific challenges faced by the country receiving the aid. In the first stage, the countries designated to receive aid are Cameroon, Senegal, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Haiti.

Our Sages (Avot 1:2) teach us that *gemillut chasadim*—acts of kindness—represent one of the three major pillars upon which the world rests. Thankfully, the Jewish state is consistently seeking new opportunities to support the world through its ongoing acts of kindness towards those in need. ■