

SEPTEMBER 5, 2011

Parashat Ki Tetzei

Heeding the Warning Signs

A stubborn and rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21: 18)

בן סורר ומורה (דברים כא:יח)

The Torah describes the *ben sorer u'moreh*, the “rebellious son” whose deviant behavior warrants his execution not for what he has done, but to prevent him from committing future crimes. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 72a) explains that he is “judged upon his end” and that it is better for him to die innocent than to be punished later for real crimes. The Talmud concludes that throughout history no court ever executed a “rebellious son,” and that this passage was included in the Torah not for practical use, but instead for us to “study and receive reward.” In addition, this text reminds us that we must recognize that one’s current actions can be a warning sign for the future—that ignoring those troubling signs only leads to more devastating consequences that could have been prevented.

This powerful lesson resonates with us today as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continues to promote the destruction of the state of Israel, creating incredible fears about what the future holds.

In his book [The Prime Ministers](#), Yehuda Avner quotes former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin—whose mother, father and brother were killed in the Holocaust—as saying, “If an enemy of our people says he seeks to destroy us, believe him. Don’t doubt him for a moment. Don’t make light of it. Do all in your power to deny him the means of carrying out his satanic intent.” Begin’s words help us contextualize the troubling comments and actions of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Recently, Ahmadinejad said that “there will be no room for Israel in the region after the formation of a Palestinian state, and that once the state is established, the liberation of all Palestinian lands should follow,” [The Associated Press](#) reported. According to [Haaretz](#), the Iranian ISNA news agency also quoted Ahmadinejad as saying, “Iran believes that whoever is for humanity should also be for eradicating the Zionist regime (Israel) as a symbol of suppression and discrimination.” For more on Iran, click [here](#).

Our *parashah* teaches us to heed the warning signs of future trouble. In light of our people’s history, we have no choice but to take Iran’s president at his word and work to ensure that Iran’s threats never become reality. ■

A Bond of Brotherhood

You shall surely help him to lift them up with him (Deuteronomy 22:4)

הקם תקים עמו (דברים כב:ד)

In commanding that we assist our brother in raising his fallen donkey (see 22:4), the Torah imbues within us the critical importance of shared suffering and responsibility. Why, though, does the Torah repeat the word “to lift” (*hakem takim*) twice? The Midrash (Sifrei) explains that “[This teaches that] if he raised [the animal] and it fell, and then he raised it and it fell even five times, we are still obligated [to help].” Interestingly, the word “your brother” (*achicha*) appears six times in this short section (21:1-4), teaching us that sharing our brother’s burden is not a one-time responsibility. As many times as one’s brother needs assistance and support, we must be there to lift him up.

A Jew’s responsibility to his or her brother does not just apply to the individual, but also to brother nations. As the United States commemorates the 10th anniversary of the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001, it can take solace

in the bond of brotherhood and mutual support that it shares with the Jewish state, and the commitment each nation has made to uphold and raise up the other in times of need.

For decades, the people of America have stood by Israel's side, offering not only tangible, material support, but also emotional and moral support for the Jewish state during times of suffering and strife. Our two nations have forged a relationship that is beyond that of allies, a true friendship built on a foundation of respect and reciprocal caring that has benefited both of our countries. After the United States suffered the devastating blow of September 11, 2001, while many in the Arab world celebrated America's tragedy and suffering, Israel stood by its longtime friend and ally, offering not only physical support in critical areas of security, but also the moral support that can only be offered by a "brother" who has suffered the same pains. On that fateful day, America joined the brotherhood of nations that understands, first-hand, the true danger that radical Islam presents to the civilized world. Today, in the post-9/11 world, the United States and Israel are working more closely together than ever before to defeat the common threats of radicalism and terrorism on the battlefield and at home.

As America looks back at the past 10 years and the tragedy that we, as a nation, suffered on September 11, we also ponder the future, taking solace in the fact that the United States and Israel will always support each other like brothers. No matter how many times one may fall, the other remains steadfast in its commitment to fulfilling the words of the Midrash. Our historic fabrics have changed, but we will remain as strong and resilient as brothers. ■

A Tale of Two Egypts

You shall not abhor an Egyptian (Deuteronomy 23:8)

לֹא תִתְעַב מִצְרַיִם (דְּבָרִים כג:ח)

The Torah lists a number of ancient nations whose members the Israelites were prohibited to marry, even if they converted to Judaism. For example, they could not marry the descendants of Ammon and Moab, whose ancestors "Did not come forward with bread and water along the way" (23:5). Egyptians, however, were not to be rejected. Rashi (on 23:8) wonders why the Torah takes such a relatively positive disposition towards a nation that had enslaved the Jews for generations, and explains that Egypt's relationship with the Israelites was complex, at times positive and negative. The Israelites were permitted to marry Egyptians, "even though they cast your firstborn into the Nile. What is the reason for this? [It is] because they were for you a host during your time of need." Thus we learn that because the Egyptians had offered assistance to Jacob and his sons during the famine (Genesis, chapter 45) they could marry into the Jewish nation.

The Torah reminds us of the historic relationship between the Israelites and the ancient Egyptians, a people who both assisted and enslaved the Jews. The Jewish people have also had a complex relationship with modern Egypt, a nation that was once committed to the destruction of the Jewish state, and at other times one of Israel's greatest partners in peace. Now, following the fall of the Mubarak regime, the next chapter of this complex relationship is unknown.

While it seems like a long time ago, for decades Egypt was Israel's most powerful enemy, fighting four major wars against the Jewish state. For this reason, the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty has served as the cornerstone of Israeli security. The treaty enabled Israel to reduce defense spending from 23 to 8 percent of its gross domestic product, and brought tranquility and stability to the border between the two countries. However, following the ouster of the Mubarak regime, the situation in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula has devolved. Terrorist organizations and Bedouin tribes have exploited this lawless region to step up weapons smuggling and perpetrate terrorist attacks. The United States and the international community must further press Egypt's leaders to bolster security along the Israeli-Egyptian and Egyptian-Gazan borders as part of Cairo's maintenance of its international obligations, including the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. For more on what Egypt must do to secure the Sinai Peninsula, click [here](#).

In ancient times, Egypt first assisted and then oppressed the nation of Israel. Today, as Egypt builds a new government, they must choose between peace and antagonism towards the Jewish state. The United States should make clear their expectations that Egypt uphold the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, and continue to speak out against the lawlessness in the Sinai and the need for Egyptian forces to gain control of the area. ■

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