

JULY 11, 2011

Parashat Pinchas

Seeking Peace, Seeking Balance

Behold, I give him My covenant of peace (Numbers 25:12) (הנני נותן לו את בריתי שלום (במדבר כה:יב))

While we read of Phinehas in our *parashah*, amazingly we also read of his existence hundreds of years later at the end of the book of Judges (20:28). How did Phinehas live so long? S'forno (on 25:12) explains that his longevity hinged on the blessing of peace that God granted him. Peace is a condition of balance. When different forces find themselves in balance with each other, whether they be different parts of the body, or the body and the soul, they sustain each other indefinitely. S'forno writes that "Loss [and decay] can only happen through the cause of resistance of opposites." Blessed with divine peace, Phinehas attained the ultimate level of balance, living almost indefinitely.

According to S'forno, peace represents the maintenance of balance, allowing different entities to exist harmoniously. In its drive to build a nuclear weapon, Iran seeks to gain a distinct military advantage over its neighbors, threatening the delicate balance of power in the Middle East.

As the leading state sponsor of international terrorism, a nuclear-armed Iran would pose unacceptable threats to the United States and its allies. Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would likely spur a regional nuclear arms race, mark the death knell of the global non-proliferation regime, and exponentially increase the likelihood that nuclear weapons might actually be used someday in the future. Underscoring this fact, [CBS news](#) recently reported that representatives of the Saudi Arabian government declared that they could not allow Iran to be the only nuclear country on the Persian Gulf. "A senior official in Riyadh said: 'We cannot live in a situation where Iran has nuclear weapons and we don't. It's as simple as that. If Iran develops a nuclear weapon, that will be unacceptable to us and we will have to follow suit.'" Similarly, [The Guardian](#) reported that, "Prince Turki al-Faisal, a former Saudi intelligence chief and ambassador to Washington, warned senior NATO military officials that the existence of such a device 'would compel Saudi Arabia ... to pursue policies which could lead to untold and possibly dramatic consequences.'" For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

S'forno reminds us that balance represents the key to maintaining peace. It is precisely this sense of balance that a nuclear Iran would destroy, by bringing fear and instability to a region starving for stability. ■

Continued Animosity

For they harass you (Numbers 25:18)

כי צררים הם לכם (במדבר כה:יח)

According to the Torah, God commanded Moses to "harass the Midianites...for they harass you." Kli Yakkar (on 25:18) notes that despite the fact that hostilities between the Midianites and the Israelites had ended, the Torah describes the Midianite harassment in the present tense. If their incitement had ended, how were they harassing the Jewish nation? Kli Yakkar explains that once the Midianites had plainly demonstrated their enmity for the Jewish nation, "God knew...that still their anger did not rest and they still harassed [the Jews], considering plans to devise wicked plots, perhaps even worse than their original plans." Because the nation of Midian so hated the Jews, even a time of quiet represented not peace, but a simple pause as they considered their next plan to attack the Jewish nation.

Like the people of Midian, who continually plotted means to attack and harass the Jewish people, Hamas continues to threaten the Jewish state, making peace more difficult to attain.

Hamas (an Arabic acronym for “Islamic Resistance Movement”) was founded in the late 1980s with the self-proclaimed goal of the destruction of Israel and the establishment of a Muslim theocracy in its place. During the past 20 years, Hamas has killed hundreds of Israelis and Americans in suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks inside Israel. Hamas has taken control of Gaza and turned the area into a launching pad for terrorist activity, firing thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians. Now, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas’ decision to formally ink a reconciliation agreement with Hamas is likely to severely undermine U.S. peace efforts. The unity deal does not require Hamas to change its positions. As leading members of Congress have urged, the United States should suspend aid to the PA unless it becomes clear that a new government will meet international expectations that it renounce violence, recognize Israel’s right to exist and accept the commitments made by prior PA governments. For more on how the Palestinian unity deal undermines peace prospects, click [here](#).

Like the people of Midian, the Hamas regime, bent on Israel’s destruction, continues to threaten the Jewish nation, despite a historic moment when peace should be the priority. Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve the chance to live in peace, a seemingly unlikely end when Hamas refuses to acknowledge and accept the right of Israel to exist. ■

Original Women’s Rights

The daughters of Zelophehad speak right (Numbers 27:7)

כן בנות צלפחד דברת (במדבר כז:ז)

When Moses designated plots for the nation throughout the Land of Israel, the daughters of Zelophehad found themselves without an inheritance because their father had no male heir. These five women saw the situation as unfair and successfully petitioned to receive their father’s portion in his stead. Rashi (on 27:5) notes that the law about female inheritance could have been conveyed in the text without the surrounding story, “but the daughters of Zelophehad merited that it should be written by their action.” The Midrash (Sifrei), noting that God says that the women “speak right,” explains that God told Moses: “The daughters of Zelophehad claimed properly, for [this section of the law] is written [according to their claim] in the heavens. Fortunate is the person with whom God agrees.”

In staking their claim before Moses and the nation, the daughters of Zelophehad established a precedent of upholding the rights of women within Jewish tradition. The modern state of Israel continues to uphold that tradition, as it remains a beacon of women’s rights and freedom in the Middle East.

Women have played an integral part in the founding and flourishing of the state of Israel. Regardless of religion or ethnicity, all women in Israel enjoy equal rights, protections under the law and opportunities to succeed and contribute to society. Women have long held important academic posts, leadership positions in government and served alongside their male counterparts in the defense of the Jewish state. Today Israeli women continue to live up to this legacy by seeking ways to promote peace. Amal Elsana Alh’jooj and Vivian Silver (respectively an Arab citizen of Israel and a Jewish citizen of Israel) embody the powerful role of Israeli women in society as the two co-executive directors of the Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development. For their work with the organization, the pair was recently awarded the Victor J. Goldberg Prize for Peace in the Middle East. As [Israel21c](#) reports, “Highlighted was their initiative to train and empower the Arab Bedouin community of the Negev with a particular emphasis on the crucial role of women in the process of community development... ‘In a sense we are a microcosm of what our two peoples could potentially be—open to each other’s cultures, respectful of our differences, working for a better world for both our peoples,’ said Silver.”

While the daughters of Zelophehad demonstrated courage in their demand to be recognized and afforded the rights due to them, they did so confident that their society would uphold and protect their right to be heard. The work of incredible women like Amal and Vivian remind us that this important legacy lives on in the Jewish state. ■