

AUGUST 29, 2011

Parashat Shoftim

Fighting Racism with Racism

Justice, Justice you shall pursue (Deuteronomy 16:20)

צדק צדק תרדוף (דברים טז:כ)

Why does the Torah repeat the word “justice” in the text? Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa explained that when seeking justice, one must also utilize fair and proper methods in order to achieve that goal. Therefore, the Torah repeats the word to emphasize that one must pursue justice through righteous means. Put simply, the ends never justify the means, and the use of injustice will never lead to moral results. According to Rabbi Bunim, when a person utilizes inappropriate means to achieve seemingly lofty goals, not only will those efforts fail, but the inappropriate behavior itself will also call into question the sincerity and propriety of the entire effort.

Despite the futility of seeking justice through unjust means, the United Nations—through its upcoming commemoration of the Durban World Conference Against Racism, commonly referred to as Durban III—will be ostensibly meeting to stamp out racism while promoting an anti-Semitic agenda.

Australia recently joined the growing list of nations that will not attend the commemoration of the Durban World Conference Against Racism at the opening of the United Nations’ meeting in New York in September, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The conference will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the first Durban conference, which “was widely denounced as an anti-Semitic, U.N.-sponsored event that singled out Jews and Israel in order to attack them, including calls to eliminate Israel.” Since the program was finalized last December, several Western countries including Canada, the Czech Republic, Italy and the Netherlands have promised to boycott the meeting. The United States, which voted against the original Durban III resolution, announced in June that it too would boycott the meeting. Following bipartisan calls from members of Congress to U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice, urging her to refrain from participating in the conference, Joseph E. Macmanus, Acting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative Affairs, [explained](#) that the United States would not participate because the Durban process “included ugly displays of intolerance and anti-Semitism.”

In a statement following last year’s vote against a U.N. resolution to hold a 10th anniversary of the Durban Declaration meeting, Rice [said](#) that “The United States is fully committed to...work with all partners to uphold human rights and fight racism around the world.” Yet, the U.S. is abstaining from the commemoration in September because it recognizes that just as justice cannot be achieved through unjust means, an anti-Semitic conference is the worst possible venue to address combating racism around the world. ■

Saving Innocent Lives

That innocent blood not be shed (Deuteronomy 19:10)

ולא ישפך דם נקי (דברים יט:י)

According to the Torah, God instructed the Israelites to build cities of refuge which would offer sanctuary to accidental killers in order to ensure that aggrieved members of a victim’s family would not shed innocent blood in an act of vengeance. Expanding on this instruction, the Midrash (Tanaim Devarim 19:10) adds that “If you did not fix the roads and did not fix the signage [guiding the way to a city of refuge] (and the person was not able to reach the city of

refuge in time), it is as if the blood that was spilled was spilled by [the Jewish nation].” Thus, the Torah demands that we not only protect the innocent, but that we also construct the necessary infrastructure to ensure their safety.

The detailed instructions regarding the cities of refuge clearly convey the importance of the infrastructure necessary to protect innocent lives. With this thought in mind, Americans should take pride in the role our government played in providing equipment that saved lives during the recent wave of missiles, rockets and mortars fired at southern Israel.

Following the firing of more than 130 projectiles at Israeli cities in southern Israel, Israeli officials praised the effectiveness of the U.S.-funded Iron Dome anti-rocket defense system, [Reuters](#) reported. Colonel Zvika Haimovitch, an Israeli Air Force officer in charge of Israel’s active air defense units, said Iron Dome interceptors had shot down 20 incoming projectiles fired by Gaza militants in the first five days of cross-border violence. Iron Dome’s makers claim it has a “very high percent success rate” and the published figures for successful intercepts suggest a 93.3 percent kill rate. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked a delegation of visiting U.S. Congressmen for their support in funding the interceptor system. While the rocket attacks from Gaza tragically killed an Israeli civilian, wounded dozens of others, and forced one million residents of the area into bomb shelters, the Iron Dome system afforded Israel significant protection for its citizens, and allowed the Israel Defense Forces to refrain from escalating the situation in the south. Earlier this year, the United States said it planned to help Israel buy four new batteries after budgeting \$203.8 million in congressional funding assistance for the system in fiscal year 2011.

The cities of refuge were specifically designed with the goal of saving innocent lives. Following this life-affirming ethic, the United States, through its partnership with Israel in building the Iron Dome system, has successfully protected the lives of innocent Israelis from potentially lethal rocket attacks. ■

Taking Responsibility, Taking Action

Our hands did not spill... (Deuteronomy 21:7)

יְדִינוּ לֹא שָׁפְכוּ (דְּבָרִים כ"ז)

In the powerful *eglah arufah* ritual, which was observed if an unidentified body was found on the road between two cities, the elders of the closest city would break the neck of a calf and symbolically wash their hands over the calf in a barren valley. They would then proclaim, “Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it” after which they would ask God for forgiveness. Rashi (on 21:7) wonders, “Does anyone think that the elders of the court are murderers? Rather [they must declare that] ‘we did not see him and send him off without food or accompaniment.’” By asking forgiveness, the elders took responsibility for the lost life in order to reaffirm their communal obligation to protect and provide for every member of the community.

The ritual of the *eglah arufah* reminded the Israelites of their shared responsibility for their fellow Jews, and especially those in need. Recently, a group of activists coordinated a flotilla to similarly raise awareness of the importance of taking action on behalf of the Jewish state.

On August 14th, a small flotilla of four boats sailed from Ashkelon to Ashdod to express solidarity with Israel, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. Dubbed the Blue and White Flotilla, “Four hundred people participated in the Young Leadership Department of the World Mizrahi Movement and Yavneh Olami student organization initiative to raise morale among Israeli soldiers and citizens following the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident and the backlash Israel received in its aftermath.” According to the pro-Israel flotilla’s Facebook page, “Beyond an expression of solidarity and standing alongside the state of Israel, the goal of the Blue & White Flotilla is to rouse young Jews around the world [to] prepare for and assist Israel in coping with the challenges it faces in the near future.” Decorated in blue and white, the boats also expressed support for the Israeli Navy, which prevented anti-Israel flotillas from breaching Israel’s blockade of Gaza. To learn how you can help support Israel, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

Both the *eglah arufah* ceremony and the Blue and White Flotilla were designed to remind us of one important fact: that the Jewish community has a responsibility to protect and defend the people of Israel. ■