

MAY 14, 2012

Parashat Behar-Bechukotai

A Foundation of Liberty

And proclaim liberty (Leviticus 25:10)

וקראתם דרור (ויקרא כה:י)

The Talmud notes that instead of proclaiming “freedom” (from the Hebrew word “*chofesh*”), during the Jubilee year we must proclaim “*dror*” (which we translate to mean “liberty”), a word found only once—here—in the entire Torah. While many commentators agree that the word alludes to the freeing of all slaves, Dr. Aviad Cohen, a faculty member of Hebrew University, suggests that the word *dror* implies that all of Israel must enjoy freedom of movement, a core principle in any truly open society. The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 9b) explains, “Said Rabbi Yehuda, What is the meaning of the word *dror*? It is like one who dwells where he chooses and transports merchandise throughout the country.” Rashi adds, “For he lives anywhere he wishes, and is not in the possession of anyone else.”

The Torah established liberty to be a fundamental value in Judaism. The Jewish state continues to uphold this idea as its press freely distributes information, and reports on almost every political and diplomatic development.

Freedom House, an American non-governmental organization, released its [latest annual survey](#) of freedom of the press around the world. Israel’s press, with myriad publications representing all views within its society, was ranked first in its regional group. Among the 20 countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, comprising 392 million people, “[Israel was] the only country in the region that received a ‘free’ rating,” [The Times of Israel](#) reported. Paradoxically, while the Arab Spring did prompt greater freedom in some countries, including Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, [The Jerusalem Post](#) noted that, “At the same time, the Arab Spring protests that unleashed a new era of media freedom also elicited a pushback from the region’s authoritarian regimes.” According to Freedom House’s [report](#), in Israel, “Legal protections for freedom of the press are robust [and] the Supreme Court has affirmed that freedom of expression is an essential component of human dignity.” For more on Israel’s freedom, click [here](#).

The very language that the Torah utilizes underlines the fundamental importance of liberty throughout Jewish society. As Freedom House has demonstrated, Israel remains fully committed to this value, disseminating information and ensuring a free, democratic society. ■

Modern Fruits of the Land

And the land shall yield her fruit (Leviticus 25:19)

ונתנה הארץ פריה (ויקרא כה:יט)

Discussing the uniqueness of the Land of Israel, Moses promised the nation that should they carefully follow the laws of *shemittah*, “the land shall yield her fruit, and you shall eat until you have enough, and dwell therein in safety” (25:19). How would eating the fruit of the land give strength to the nation? Chizkuni explains (on 25:19) that the blessings of the physical prosperity would give the people of Israel the economic self-reliance to maintain their hold on the land. He writes, “For the land will give you strength, and your foes will not eat its fruits [in your place].”

While in ancient times, the economic blessings of the fruit of the Holy Land were purely agricultural, Israel has recently discovered new “fruits” that could provide the Jewish state with economic strength for decades to come.

Egypt recently cancelled a 20-year agreement signed in 2005 to sell natural gas to Israel, following months of sabotage and pipeline attacks in the Sinai Desert that continually interrupted the flow of gas to the Jewish state. Thankfully, Israel has taken critical steps to insulate itself from such measures in the future and ensure its own energy independence. Israeli Energy Minister Uzi Landau told [Reuters](#) that, “Nearly two years now we have been preparing for a halt in supplies. So, while it causes great discomfort and will bring a rise in energy prices, Israel has been developing its energy market without depending on this gas.” In fact, Israel’s own newly discovered reserves from huge offshore gas fields could secure its energy needs for decades. Results show that over 100 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of reserves could lay untapped under the Mediterranean Sea. Israel’s Tamar and Leviathan gas fields are among the biggest offshore findings in decades, with reserve estimates of 8.5 and 16 tcf respectively. Landau added, “If Moses were to take (the Israelites) out of Egypt today and to Israel, he would have described Israel as a land of milk, honey and natural gas.” For more on how Israel contributes to a cleaner world, click [here](#).

Moses’ blessing that the fruit of the land provide the people of Israel with a means of self-reliance still resonates today as natural gas is another “fruit” that can be found in the land of milk and honey. ■

Facing the Truth

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

ואם בהקתי תמאסו (ויקרא כו:טו)

According to the Torah, after outlining the blessings that the Jewish nation would enjoy for following God’s word, Moses delivered a powerful, frightening *tochechah*, or rebuke, (26:14-46) which describes in great detail the terrible punishments that would befall the nation for failing to heed the dictates of the Torah. Yet, despite its length, traditionally the entire section is read uninterrupted, in a single *aliyah* (see Shulchan Aruch Orech Chaim 428:6). The Mishnah Berurah explains that we read the entire rebuke as a single unit based upon a verse in Proverbs (3:12), “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord.” Were one person to stop reading and another to take his place, it would seem as if the first was repulsed by the harsh words of the section. Instead, a single person reads the section in its entirety, accepting the difficult, challenging words of the *tochechah*.

To overcome a natural preference to overlook facts we find discomfoting, we specifically read the section of rebuke without interruption. Today, we must recognize the importance of this lesson and not look past the disturbing ramifications of a nuclear Iran.

Here in America, we don’t always see how a nuclear Iran would threaten our country. The dangers often seem distant and foreign. But, now is the time to face the realities. We cannot ignore the fact that a nuclear Iran would not only present a mortal danger to the Jewish state, but would directly threaten America’s economic and national security. With a nuclear weapon, Iran could coerce oil-exporting nations to reduce their production of oil, causing the cost of oil to skyrocket, forcing Americans to pay more for everything from food to cars. Iran, emboldened by its nuclear arsenal, would be able to dramatically increase its support to terrorists and insurgents. The country could also arm terrorists and rogue states with nuclear weapons. Currently the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism, Iran already provides weapons and supports Islamist terrorists such as Hamas and Hizballah. Why wouldn’t it arm them with nuclear materials as well? Additionally, nuclear weapons in Iran would spur a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. Arab countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt have already hinted they would develop such a capability. Nuclear weapons would likely spread elsewhere around the globe, increasing the danger from such weapons for generations to come. Finally, America, having failed in its objective to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, would be seen in the Middle East as weak, diminishing the United States’ influence in that critical part of the world. For more on how a nuclear Iran threatens America, click [here](#).

It’s easy to think of Iran as a country distant from our borders. But like the *tochechah*, which we read without interruption, the United States must not shy away from the disturbing information and confront the true danger that a nuclear armed Iran would present to our country’s national interests. ■

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