

JULY 9, 2012

Parashat Pinchas

A Dangerous Combination

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

Why was Phinehas given a blessing of peace? Rav Avraham Shmuel Sofer, author of *Ktaf Sofer* (See *Me'otzareinu Hayashan*, vol. 3 p.129) explained that precisely because Phinehas had demonstrated his great capacity for zealotry through the use of violence, it was necessary to balance his tendency with a blessing of peaceful temperament. This would serve as a counter balance to Phinehas' proclivity to zealotry and ensure that he only resorted to violence in extremely rare circumstances, as the option of absolute last resort. Without this blessing of peace, Phinehas' aggressive nature proved destructive and harmful.

Through the story of Phinehas we see that aggression and great power can lead even the righteous to a dangerous situation. With this in mind, and in light of Iran's radical ethics and support for terrorism, the Islamic Republic's nuclear ambition cannot go unchecked.

The State Department has labeled Iran as the world's "most active state sponsor of terrorism." Iran's terrorist proxies—Hizballah and Hamas—have killed scores of American and Israeli civilians and actively undermined peace efforts in the Middle East. Over the past year, Iran has attempted to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington and kill Israeli diplomats in India, Thailand and Georgia. Iran has also been selling arms to Syria, in violation of United Nations sanctions. According to [Reuters](#), a recent United Nations report laid out Iranian sanctions violations. The report stated, "Iran has continued to defy the international community through illegal arms shipments." As Iran continues to sponsor the ongoing 16 month assault on opposition forces determined to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the regime also continues research on its nuclear weapons program, insisting on its natural rights to achieve nuclear power. Although Iran claims research is for "peaceful purposes only," when the same government supplies assault rifles, machine guns, explosives, detonators, mortal shells and other items to support brutal, mass killings, evidence on the ground clearly suggests otherwise. Iran's support for terrorism combined with nuclear power would be a frightening prospect for world peace. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Phinehas' combination of zealotry and power was tempered with a blessing of peace to prevent his aggression from overcoming him. If Iran successfully combines its radicalism with the power of nuclear arms, it would immediately jeopardize peace in the Middle East and around the world. ■

Blaming the Victim

For they harass you (Numbers 25:18)

כי צררים הם לכם (במדבר כה:יח)

At the end of Parashat Balak, the Torah states that the daughters of Moab enticed the Israelite men to sin and also mentions an Israelite man who consorted with a Midianite woman, who we later learn was the princess Cozbi. In the aftermath of that episode, we read that God commanded Moses to "harass the Midianites" (25:17). Why were the Israelites commanded to pursue the Midianites if it was mainly the Moabites who enticed them? Malbim (on 25:18) explains that the rulers of Midian refused to recognize their role in Cozbi's death. "From that point onward, they harbored hatred over their princess, and they would always be ready to exact vengeance for this episode." Moses was

commanded to smite them because the Midianites used Cozbi's death to attack the nation of Israel, even though they intentionally sent her.

Like the Midianites who ignored Cozbi's actions and saw her as a victim and a martyr, Egypt's new president has recently blamed the U.S. for imprisoning a terrorist mastermind and called for his freedom.

Egypt's newly elected president, Mohammed Morsi, recently addressed tens of thousands of supporters in Tahrir Square. [Slate Magazine](#) reported that Morsi used the opportunity, one of his first major speeches, to call for the release of a terrorist jailed in the United States. He stated, "I see the family of Dr. Omar Abdel Rahman, and I see the banners for civilians imprisoned on military orders, and those jailed during the course of the revolution from the beginning until now [...] It is my duty to exert every effort, from tomorrow, until all of them are free, including Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman." Rahman is currently serving a life sentence for his role in a plot to blow up the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels in New York City, the United Nations building in New York City and other targets in the 1990s. He has also been linked to the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 that killed six and injured more than a thousand. American leaders quickly condemned Morsi's comments. For more on Egypt, click [here](#).

The Midianites blamed the Jews for the death of Cozbi, when her decisions were what brought about her untimely end. Egypt's new president similarly blames America for jailing a terrorist whose own actions placed him in prison. ■

A Dedicated Leader

Who may go out before them (Numbers 27:17)

אשר יצא לפניהם (במדבר כז:יז)

Moses learned of his own impending death and asked that a new leader be appointed for the people. He requested that this leader be someone who will "go out before them, and who may come in before them" (27:17). While generally this phrase refers to military leadership, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch (see his commentary on 27:17) explains that Moses described a leader willing to devote himself to work for the good of the nation. "[Going out and coming in] refers to his ability, apart from military activity, for public activity of every kind...the activity of the shepherd is devoted to the thriving and welfare of the flock."

As the state of Israel recently mourned the death of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir the country remembers a dedicated and devoted public servant who fulfilled Moses' dictate to "go out" before his people and work for the good of the nation.

After immigrating to Palestine from the Russian Empire in 1935, Yitzhak Shamir devoted much of his life to ensure the safety and security of the Jewish people. An ardent Zionist throughout his life, Shamir served in pre-state militias during the British mandate period and then for over a decade in the Mossad, protecting Israel's interests around the world. When Menachem Begin retired in 1983, Shamir became prime minister. He served two separate terms as leader of the Jewish state and was the longest serving Israeli prime minister besides David Ben-Gurion. Shamir also dedicated himself to bringing Jews from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia to Israel. Shamir may be remembered best for his close cooperation with and support of the United States during Operation Desert Storm. The White House released a [statement](#) commenting on Shamir's lifelong dedication to the state of Israel and praised Shamir for helping to forge strong ties with the U.S. "From his days working for Israel's independence to his service as Prime Minister, he strengthened Israel's security and advanced the partnership between the United States and Israel."

Moses requested that the new leader devote himself to work for the good of the nation. No matter where we fall on the political spectrum, as we remember Yitzhak Shamir we see that he was just that—a leader who dedicated his life to ensure the existence of Israel, devoting himself to the good of the Jewish people. ■

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