



Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 13, 2012

Parashat Re'eh

A Fateful Choice

A blessing and a curse (Deuteronomy 11:26)

ברכה וקללה (דברים יא:כו)

In his address to the nation, Moses presented the Children of Israel with a stark choice: “I set before you this day a blessing and a curse” (11:26). Following the commandments would bring the nation blessings; abandoning them would bring suffering and despair. S’forno (on 11:26) notes the significance of Moses offering only two options. “These are two extremes, for the blessing [brings] success greater than they require [to survive]...and the curse is an affliction [that will bring] a lacking, in which they cannot acquire that which they need. And both of these lay before you, to attain that which you choose.”

The Israelite choice between receiving the blessings of following the rules or the consequences of going their own route reminds us of the situation of the Iranian regime today. It can follow the rules prescribed by the international community and begin the path towards normalized relations, or it can continue its pursuit of nuclear weapons while suffering harsh economic sanctions.

As Iran presses forward with its research to develop nuclear weapons, international sanctions continue to take their toll on the Islamic Republic’s economy. To make sure these sanctions are truly crippling, Congress overwhelmingly passed a new package of sanctions against Iran this month which aims to punish banks, insurance companies and shippers that help Tehran sell its oil. According to [Bloomberg News](#), Iran is OPEC’s third-largest producer of oil and U.S.-led sanctions are costing Iran \$133 million a day in lost sales. Since sanctions that ban the purchase, transport, financing and insuring of Iranian crude began on July 1, shipments from Iran have plunged by 1.2 million barrels a day, or 52 percent. Annualized, that would cost Iran about \$48 billion in revenue, equivalent to 10 percent of its economy. As Iran confronts increasingly severe effects of the sanctions, the Iranian rial has lost around half of its value since last year. For more on the impact sanctions are having on Iran’s economy, click [here](#).

Moses offered the nation the choice to determine whether they would suffer or be blessed. Iran faces a similar choice: abandon its military nuclear program and restore its economy or continue its attempts to develop the most deadly weapons known to man and suffer crippling sanctions. ■

Open Hands

For you shall open your hand to him (Deuteronomy 15:8)

כי פתח תפתח את ידך לו (דברים טו:ח)

Throughout the Bible we are commanded to take care of the needy, including the admonition “you shall open your hand to him; you shall lend him his requirement, whatever is lacking to him (15:8). Rabbi Meir Israel Kagan, expounding on the concept of acting charitably (see *Shivim Panim l’Torah* vol. 5 pp. 108-109), related this idea to the verse “May only goodness and kindness chase me all the days of my life” (Psalms 23:6). How can a goodness and kindness chase after a person? According to Rabbi Kagan, because we can feel as if our acts of kindness cause us detriment and loss, we at times consider abandoning those benevolent deeds. Therefore, even when we can find strong, compelling reasons to withhold aid to the needy, we must overcome that desire and offer assistance to the less fortunate. When we do so, the kindness that chases after us helps make the world a better place.

The legacy of “opening one’s hand” to those in need requires that we proffer help to anyone who requires it. Living up to this concept, the state of Israel recently offered critical medical care to a close relative of the leader of Hamas.

Ismail Haniyeh, the leader of Hamas, refuses to recognize Israel’s right to exist and is responsible for both diplomatic and military attacks against Israel. Recently at a mass prayer session outside the Egyptian Embassy in Gaza, following the foiled terror attack against Israel in which 16 Egyptians were killed, Haniyeh joined the Muslim Brotherhood in accusing Israel of orchestrating the attack. Yet, despite Haniyeh’s repeated and persistent antagonism, Israel nonetheless provided necessary medical care that saved the life of his relative. [Ynet](#) recently reported that Haniyeh’s brother-in-law suffered a serious cardiac episode which could not be treated at any hospital in Gaza. After he filed an urgent entry request with Israeli authorities, a Palestinian ambulance transported him to the Erez Crossing, where he was moved to a Magen David Adom vehicle. From there he was taken to Beilinson hospital in Petah Tikva for urgent medical treatment. After about a week of in-patient treatment, his condition stabilized allowing him to return to Gaza.

Just as the Torah admonishes us not to “close our hand” to a person in need, the Jewish state willingly comes to the aid of those in need—even if that someone happens to be a close relative of a sworn enemy of the Jewish people. ■

Great Dividends

For, because of this matter (Deuteronomy 15:10)

כי בגלל הדבר הזה (דברים טו:י)

Moses advised the Israelites to give generously to the needy, noting that “your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because that for this thing the Lord your God will bless you” (15:10). From this we learn that those who give will in return be given divine blessings specifically so that they can share their blessings with others. Netziv (in Ha’amek Davar on 15:10) adds that giving to others also brings additional benefits worth far more than the monetary value of the gift itself. He quotes the dictum of the Sages which states that “More than the [wealthy] home owner does for the needy [by giving him aid], the needy does for the homeowner” (Midrash Rabbah Ruth 5:9).

Judaism teaches that giving to those in need pays dividends far greater than the value of that generosity. This notion certainly applies to U.S. aid to Israel that has helped the Jewish state give back to America and the rest of the world.

In his recent address to the Aspen Institute in Colorado, USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah [noted](#) that “most of the American public greatly overestimates foreign aid as nearly a quarter of the total budget, instead of its actual level of 1 percent.” Many people use this misconception to argue against continued American aid to Israel. Yet, direct aid to Israel provides tangible benefits to the United States that far outweighs the cost. At least 75 percent of U.S. military aid to Israel must be used to purchase American military equipment, providing jobs and contributing to America’s industrial base. American aid also supports joint research programs including the Arrow, a missile defense system which protects Israeli civilians from missiles in Gaza and American troops serving across the Middle East. Due to America’s unique relationship with Israel, America benefits from access to Israeli intelligence providing critical information about radical regimes and terrorist groups that threaten America’s interests and its safety. Furthermore, Israel serves as a stronghold of democracy, furthering America’s interests in the Middle East. U.S. assistance to Israel is the most tangible manifestation of American support for the Jewish state, especially during a time of tremendous turmoil in the region. Yet, aid to Israel also represents a cost-effective way to serve critical American interests and ensures that Americans around the world are safer and more secure. For more on foreign aid to Israel, click [here](#).

The Sages teach that the giver often benefits more than the beneficiary of that gift. We see this today as American aid to Israel represents an investment that continues to pay great dividends to the American people. ■

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