



Sermon Tidbits

SEPTEMBER 3, 2012

Parashat Ki Tavo

Taking Action for the Land

And you will possess it and dwell within it (Deuteronomy 26:1)

וירשת וישבת בה (דברים כו:א)

If the Jewish people were given the Land of Israel as an inheritance, then, according to the Torah, the Land by definition belongs to the nation. Why then does the Torah emphasize that the Israelites must both “possess it and dwell within it” (26:1)? Rabbi Simcha Raz (see *Shivim Panim L’Torah*, vol. V p. 188) explains that the Land of Israel is acquired in two distinct ways. First and foremost, the Land is a gift from God—an inheritance. But we must also acquire the Land in a second manner, with “the sweat of our brow and the work of our hands...A person cannot merit inheritance of the Land unless he works and toils on her behalf...”

Just as the ancient Israelites did not take the Land of Israel for granted, as American Jews we must also be willing to work hard to ensure a safe and secure Jewish state.

The Jewish community in the United States has played a critical role in Israel’s birth, development and continued growth. Over the decades, when Israel’s very existence was threatened time and time again, the United States—spurred by the efforts of the American Jewish community—provided the crucial military and diplomatic assistance. Congress has been a foundation of support for the U.S.-Israel relationship by supporting aid, helping stop Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability, supporting Israel’s right to defend itself and reinforcing American policy that peace will only be achieved through direct negotiations. Thanks to the hard work and encouragement of the pro-Israel community in America, the United States has provided important economic and military assistance to Israel, which enables Israel to defend itself. Still, as American Jews, we can never allow ourselves to take these successes for granted. They result from the dedicated American citizens, both Democrats and Republicans, who value a solid U.S.-Israel relationship, and invest their time, resources and energy into ensuring the safety and security of the Jewish state. For more on how to get involved, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

We are reminded in the Torah that we can never allow ourselves to take the gift of the Jewish homeland for granted. Israel’s continued success depends on our willingness to “sweat and toil” on her behalf. ■

Holding Leaders Accountable

Cursed be the man... (Deuteronomy 27:15)

ארור האיש... (דברים כז:טו)

Immediately upon entering the Land of Israel, Moses instructed the nation to engage in a one-time ritual on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival, where the Levites delivered words of warning against specific, morally reprehensible behavior. The nation “cursed” perpetrators of crimes including the theft of land, taking advantage of the weak—including the blind, the stranger, widow and orphan—and other sins. Why engage in such theatrics in which the entire nation agrees to curse wretched behaviors? S’forno explains (on 27:15) that because the sins enumerated by the Levites during the ritual “are generally sins [perpetrated] by the leadership of the nation [which the regular people] could not prevent,” the intent of the ritual was to lay the responsibility for these sins squarely on the leaders who commit these crimes, and not on the people upon whom they prey.

S'forno's interpretation suggests that these curses uttered by the Jewish nation highlighted the heinous nature of leaders who abused their power and held the leaders accountable for their sinful behavior. As the leadership of Syria slaughters their people, they too must be held accountable for the crimes they continue to commit.

Recently, Syrian fighter planes made sorties on the outskirts of Damascus, killing at least 62 people in its eastern suburbs a day after activists accused Syrian President Bashar Assad's troops and sectarian militia of massacring hundreds of people in the neighboring town of Daraya, [Reuters](#) reported. Opposition activists said aerial attacks by at least two fighter planes had targeted poor neighborhoods inhabited predominantly by Sunni Muslims, who have been at the forefront of the fighting against Assad. Scores of mutilated bodies were found dumped on the streets and on waste ground. According to [The Washington Post](#), these were the victims of a surge of extrajudicial killings by Syrian security forces seeking to drive rebel fighters out of the capital and its suburbs. Activists say the Damascus killings reflect a new government strategy to deter support for the opposition Free Syrian Army by punishing and intimidating civilians living in areas under rebel control. Videos posted online and accounts from residents point to summary executions occurring on a scale unprecedented since the start of the 18-month-old uprising against the rule of Assad. At the United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the Daraya killings as "an appalling and brutal crime." For more on Syria, click [here](#).

By cursing leaders who take advantage of the oppressed, the Jewish nation held the leaders accountable for their sins. As Bashar Assad massacres his own people, we must resolve to hold him fully accountable for his terrible actions. ■

Exposing Hidden Crimes

Cursed be he that smites his neighbor in secret (Deuteronomy 27:24) (ארור מכה רעהו בסתר (דברים כז:כד))

According to the Torah, between Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival the Levites listed out a series of criminal acts. Chizkuni (see his commentary of 17:15-25) suggests that the one thing these acts all have in common is that the sins enumerated were committed "secretly." For example, the blind man cannot identify the person who led him astray (27:18); the widow and orphan are powerless to expose an abusive oppressor (27:19); bribery (27:25) is a silent act as is one who "smites his neighbor in secret" (27:24). According to Chizkuni's interpretation, the Levites publicly cursed the secret sinners it could not police which could have unraveled the ties that bind society together.

Today, the world must similarly castigate Iran's secret, hidden program which is working feverishly to develop nuclear weapons. The U.N. nuclear agency is forming a special Iran team of experts in the fields of weapon technology, intelligence and radiation to add to its investigation. This probe suspects that Tehran has been secretly working on a nuclear weapons program, the [Associated Press](#) reported. It's unusual that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would create a unit that focused on only one country. This reflects the priority the U.N. nuclear watchdog is attaching to Iran amid fears that it is moving closer to the ability to make nuclear weapons. It also indicates frustration by top agency officials over Iran's refusal to cooperate with IAEA experts who are trying to follow up on suspicions that Tehran is secretly working on an arms program. While U.N. nuclear inspectors will also press again for access to a major military facility in talks with Iran, [Reuters](#) reported that the chances of finding any evidence of suspected atom bomb research may have dimmed because the site has been "cleaned up," diplomats and experts say. Visiting the Parchin military complex has become a priority for the IAEA as it seeks to end prolonged Iranian stonewalling of its investigation into allegations of attempts to design a nuclear weapon. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The Levites cursed those who sinned in secret specifically because those sins were the most difficult for authorities to prevent and punish. Today, Iran's secret nuclear development has left the international community with little ability to monitor or prevent it from pursuing dangerous, destabilizing nuclear weapons. ■

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