

APRIL 9, 2012

## Passover

### The Screws that Foiled Egypt

[God] removed the wheels of their chariots (Exodus 14:25)

ויסר את אפן מרכבתיו (שמות יד:כה)

Before the waters crashed down on the Egyptians in the Sea of Reeds, we read that the Egyptians tried to abandon their attack. “[God] removed the wheels of their chariots and caused them to drive with difficulty. Egypt said, ‘I shall flee before Israel’” (Exodus 14:25). As the wheels fell off their chariots, they abandoned their attack and attempted to escape. Commenting on the verse, Benno Jacob (see his commentary to Exodus, p. 403) writes, “Among the most practical ancient inventions was the wheeled wagon; yet even if a single screw was long from this machine it became useless. The fine chariots, without wheels, became a hopeless burden and an obstacle to flight.”

The loss of a single screw on the Egyptians’ chariots rendered their entire military might impotent. As Iran threatens the world with its efforts to develop nuclear weapons, it too remains susceptible to a similar weak point. Without the money critical to Iran’s economy, the wheels of its nuclear weapons program could soon fall off.

Recently adopted U.S. and international sanctions designed to persuade Tehran to end its pursuit of nuclear weapons are having an unprecedented impact on the Iranian economy. While Iran struggles to conduct basic international trade, the value of the country’s currency has dropped by half. Many analysts believe that this year Iran will experience negative gross domestic product growth for the first time in 20 years, and while the annual rate of inflation officially stands at 24 percent, prices for many basic goods have skyrocketed. Every major western energy firm has ceased investing in Iran’s energy sector, severely hampering the country’s ability to develop its oil and natural gas resources. Robert Hormats, the U.S. Under Secretary of State for economic growth, energy and the environment, [said](#) in an interview, “U.S. and European sanctions on Iran are biting on Iran’s economy...we think that there has been a real impact on their economy and that it is likely to intensify.” Iran can resume normal trade and investment ties by terminating its nuclear weapons program. Should the Islamic regime fail to do so, the international community must tighten the sanctions even further. For more on Iran visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).

Egyptians abandoned their attack when their chariots failed them, leaving them literally stuck in the mud. As the wheels of Iran’s economy grind to a halt, it must follow Egypt’s lead and abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons. ■

### Miriam’s Leadership

And Miriam sang to them (Exodus 15:21)

ותען להם מרים (שמות טו:כא)

The Song by the Sea ends with a description of Miriam, with tambourine in hand, as she led the women in a song of praise to God. Yet, in the Hebrew text, “And Miriam sang to them,” the word “them” appears in the masculine form (*lahem*), and not the feminine (*lahen*). From this detail, Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (in Sefer Kometz HaMinchah) derived that, “she did not [only] sing to the women, for if that were true, the verse should have written *lahen*. Rather, [this means that she also sang] to Moses and the Children of Israel.” Miriam sang to praise God but her song also represented an important form of leadership not only for the women of Israel, but for the entire nation.

From one minor textual implication we see that even thousands of years ago women were leaders in Jewish society. Miriam's song at the Sea of Reeds also set the stage for Jewish women throughout the generations. Now, women in the Jewish state are following in Miriam's footsteps as they take on leadership roles in the Israel Defense Forces.

Women are at the forefront of many aspects of Israeli society. From the founding of the state, they played an integral part. Israel has always had at least one woman on its Supreme Court and is the only country in the Middle East to elect a woman, Golda Meir, to the position of prime minister. Regardless of religion or ethnicity, all women in Israel enjoy equal rights, protections under the law and opportunities to succeed and contribute to society. They have long held important academic posts and leadership positions in government and served alongside their male counterparts in the defense of the state. Moreover, the [IDF](#) recognizes the differences between men and women and has created equipment including combat vests designed to suit a female torso and operating systems to better accommodate women's hands. These efforts integrate women into service and empower them to take an equal part in protecting Israel at all times. Israeli women serve in a variety of leadership positions throughout the armed forces. Over the last decade, women have been taking on record numbers of combat positions, including pilots, naval ship captains, and infantry soldiers. For more on women's roles in Israeli society, click [here](#).

Miriam's part during the Exodus established the precedent for Jewish women as leaders. All across Israel women follow her example and the Jewish state benefits from its women's wisdom, energy and ability. ■

## A Heavenly Shield (Haftarah, Seventh Day)

**You have given me the shield of Your salvation (Samuel II, 22:36) (ותתן לי מגן ישעך (שמואל ב' כב:לו))**

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In his powerful poem giving thanks to God for his salvation during times of battle, King David extols God because: "You have given me the shield of Your salvation" (Samuel II, 22:36). What shield does David refer to? Yehuda Kil (in the Da'at Mikra commentary on 22:36) writes that in ancient times, shield bearers typically accompanied archers to protect them from enemy fire. King David did in fact have such a companion during battle, but by "saying that God had provided him with that shield," David's prayer, according to Kil, is saying that his shield bearer is actually a manifestation of divine protection.

King David saw God's guiding hand in the shield-bearer standing beside him. Today, some may also see God's guiding hand in the technical know-how and American support that were critical to building the modern-day shield that protects Israel's citizens from rocket attacks.

The Iron Dome missile defense system shot down 80 percent of the 300 projectiles fired at cities in southern Israel in March. Iron Dome is just one part of a multilayered defense shield that Israel is assembling to protect itself. A system alternatively known as David's Sling or the Magic Wand is being developed to take down missiles with a medium range, while the Arrow was created jointly by the United States and Israel with long-range high-velocity missiles in mind. Israel currently has three Iron Dome batteries deployed, each one at a cost of \$80 million, but it needs another 13-15 systems to simultaneously defend the entire country. The United States assisted in the procurement effort by providing \$205 million in funding for Iron Dome in fiscal year 2011. According to the [Associated Press](#), the Pentagon plans to ask Congress for more money to fund the system. "Supporting the security of the state of Israel is a top priority of President Obama and Secretary [of Defense] Panetta," Pentagon press secretary George Little said in a statement. "The Department of Defense has been in conversations with the government of Israel about U.S. support for the acquisition of additional Iron Dome systems and intends to request an appropriate level of funding from Congress." For more on U.S.-Israel defense and homeland security cooperation, click [here](#).

King David gave thanks to God for providing the shield bearer that saved him during times of war. We too can be thankful for the current technologies and American support for Israel, but we must also make the necessary efforts to ensure that the shield protecting the Jewish state is firmly in place. ■

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