



Sermon Tidbits

JUNE 11, 2012

Parashat Shelach

Modern Milk and Honey

And this is the fruit of it (Numbers 13:27)

וזה פריה (במדבר יג:כז)

Although the spies caused damage in their negative report, they were trailblazers in one area: they were the first exporters of Israeli produce. The text relates how the spies returned to the desert with massively oversized grapes, pomegranates and figs from the Holy Land (13:23). According to the Midrash (Pesikta Rabati 28:1), the fruit required eight men to carry a single cluster of grapes. The fruit grew during that single year “what had not grown to that point in history.” The oversized fruit indicated the Land’s unique fertility. The spies carried these miraculous fruits with them to the camp to demonstrate that the Promised Land “surely flows with milk and honey” (13:27).

The spies exported the fruit from the Land of Israel to reveal its economic and agricultural vitality. In addition to produce, today Israel also exports the agricultural technology that helps make the Jewish state so productive.

In 2011, Israel exported \$3.4 billion in agricultural products, an increase of 18 percent from 2010. This year in May, thousands flocked to Agritech Israel 2012, the 18th International Agricultural Technology Exhibition in Tel Aviv. Participants learned about technologies that help farmers around the world conserve water, increase crop yields and efficiency while saving money. According to [The Times of Israel](#), the wares on display included “climate systems, hybrid seed production, cattle and poultry monitoring and control, genetics, packaging and storage to enhance freshness.” Over 30,000 people from across the globe as well as 250 companies, 80 official delegations from other countries, and even unofficial delegations from Arab countries participated in the exhibition to learn about the technologies that could increase their country’s food production. For more on Israel’s achievements, click [here](#).

As the spies scouting out ancient Israel realized, Israeli agricultural exports—be they fruits and vegetables or the technologies that produce them—tell us that the Jewish state is indeed very blessed. ■

An Honest Assessment

For we can surely do it (Numbers 13:30)

כי יכול נוכל לה (במדבר יג:ל)

Caleb countered the negative report of the spies by encouraging them and insisting that “We shall surely ascend and conquer it [Israel], for we can surely do it!” (13:30). Caleb’s “we can do it” pep talk was given to convince the people to follow Moses into the Promised Land, but according to Maimonides (on 13:30), Caleb gave this advice because he realized that the best argument was the honest one. Maimonides writes that when Caleb said that, “we can surely do it,” this meant, “It is true that the nation [dwelling in the Land] is strong. But we will overpower them and their fortified cities.” Caleb refused to sugarcoat the difficulty of the challenge and agreed with the spies that the adversaries in the Land were indeed powerful yet he insisted that the Jewish people would prevail.

Caleb best served the Jewish people by honestly confronting the challenges that went with conquering the Holy Land. As the modern state of Israel grapples with serious attacks against its sovereignty and security, we must continue to follow Caleb’s lead by confronting the challenges with resolve and determination.

Although many attacks within the Jewish state fail to grab headlines, the reality of life in Israel has forced Israelis to defend themselves against constant terrorist threats. After terrorists in the Gaza Strip recently fired a Qassam rocket towards Sderot, the Israeli Air Force bombed two arms caches in the Strip in response, [Yediot Achronot](#) reported. The rocket attack came just days after an IDF soldier was shot dead in an exchange of fire with a Palestinian terrorist, who was also killed in the clash, near the Gaza border fence. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), Staff-Sergeant Netanel Moshiashvili, age 21, was killed in a clash with a Palestinian gunman who had infiltrated Israel from the Gaza Strip. The IDF said the gunman crossed into Israel after cutting through the security fence. The incident came a week after a Palestinian sniper in the same central-Gaza area shot and wounded two soldiers. Events such as these highlight the serious threats that Israel confronts from terrorist factions in the Gaza Strip. They have also stockpiled thousands of rockets, mortars, and even anti-aircraft missiles, but Israel is ready to prevail. “Due to the fast response by the force a larger terrorist attack in the area was thwarted,” Col. Tal Hermoni, commander of the Gaza Division’s Southern Brigade said. “We are in a state of constant fighting and our mission is to protect the residents, and we do that with resolve and determination.” For more on terrorism from the Gaza Strip, click [here](#).

The men and women of the Israeli Defense Forces work to confront terrorism and thwart attacks against the Jewish state on a daily basis. Like Caleb, they recognize that the best way to address adversity is a steadfast determination to continue to thrive and prosper. ■

A Powerful Intimidation

And there we saw the Nephilim (Numbers 13:33)

ושם ראינו את הנפילים (במדבר יג:לג)

Why does the Torah describe the giants that the spies saw as *nephilim*? What is the meaning of the term that is connected to the Hebrew word *nophel* (to fall)? Rashi (on 13:33) explains that the giants are called *nephilim* because they “fell from the heavens in the Generation of Enosh.” The Midrash (Lekach Tov) offers a different interpretation, explaining that they were called *nephilim* not because they themselves “fell,” but instead because “anyone who saw them fell down out of fear.” These giants used their great size and power to intimidate potential adversaries into cowering before them.

The *nephilim*, who used their intimidating power against others, represent a lesson of caution to the world. A nuclear Iran could leverage the power it has on the oil industry forcing other states to follow Tehran’s lead, greatly increasing the price on gas and other consumer goods.

The prospect of a nuclear Iran would threaten vital American interests and directly affect the price of oil. OPEC is the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. It is comprised of twelve nations that collectively hold 75 percent of the world’s conventional oil reserves. OPEC’s members include Algeria, Angola, Ecuador, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Currently, Arab leaders are deeply anxious over the prospect of a nuclear Iran and would be highly susceptible to Iran’s use of its perceived nuclear umbrella to intimidate them and radicalize their people. Iran, the president of OPEC, could use its newfound power to intimidate other oil producing nations. While Saudi Arabia and other like-minded countries wish to keep prices stable in order to maintain long-term demand, Iran consistently presses for the highest possible prices. Iran with nuclear weapons capability would have the power to coerce other nations to fall in line with its way of thinking, forcing them to curtail oil production, which would send the global price of oil skyrocketing. If Iran is able to dominate OPEC, it will have a profound, long-term impact on oil and the world economy. For more on how a nuclear-capable Iran could not only influence OPEC, but also force Americans to pay more for gas, groceries and other consumer goods, click [here](#).

The *nephilim* used their overwhelming size to intimidate others to “fall” before them without a fight. Iran hopes that by developing nuclear weapons, it will have the power to do the same thing both to its neighbors and the West. The international community must implement crippling economic sanctions to pressure Iran to change course. ■

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