

JANUARY 28, 2013

Parashat Yitro

The Blueprint of Democracy

Able men out of all Israel (Exodus 18:25)

אנשי חיל מכל ישראל (שמות טו:כה)

During his visit to the Israelite camp, Moses' father-in-law Jethro watched as the people waited literally the entire day for the chance to be judged by an overwhelmed and overworked Moses. Jethro advised Moses to institute a hierarchal system of judges who could handle most of the cases without him. Moses accepted and instituted this shared leadership. Rabbi Yosil Rosenzweig writes that with this advice, Jethro "presented Moses with a blueprint for a primitive democracy, for a system of delegated authority and responsibility, an ideal which penetrated the Jewish consciousness in its succeeding generations."

Jethro suggested that Moses share the mantle of leadership and established the viability of a collective democratic government—a form of government utilized by Israel today.

As millions of Israelis went to the polls to cast their votes and elect a new government for the 19th Knesset, the world was reminded of the Jewish state's commitment to freedom and democracy. Israel's parliament consists of 120 members who reflect a wide range of parties and points of view including Israeli Jews, Christians, Muslim, Arabs and Druze. These elections demonstrate Israel's stability in an increasingly unstable part of the world and are a strong example of the democratic values that Israel and the United States share. Following the election, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro [tweeted](#), "Mazal tov to the Israeli people on their just completed elections! Always inspiring to see democracy in action!" The State Department also [congratulated](#) Israel's "vigorous exercise of democracy." Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA), chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said that "Israel has again demonstrated itself as a beacon of hope—a free-market democracy in a region awash in violence and extremism." He added, "I look forward to working with the new government in the coming months to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship." Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, also released a statement praising Israel's democracy saying "Israel demonstrated once again that it is the only flourishing democracy in the Middle East." For more on the Israeli election, click [here](#).

As we recently witnessed the culmination of our own recent elections in the inauguration of President Obama, we can also celebrate our Israeli friends as they continue to follow the examples set by Moses and Jethro and demonstrate the Jewish state's commitment to freedom and democracy. ■

Setting Boundaries

And you shall set bounds to the people (Exodus 19:12)

והגבלת את העם (שמות יט:יב)

During the revelation on Mount Sinai, the people of Israel were warned to stay away from the mountain. "Take heed to yourselves, that you go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mount shall be surely put to death" (19:10). In order to prevent any calamity, Moses was instructed to "set bounds" around the mountain. Rashi (on 19:10) explains that Moses "established boundaries as a sign, that they not come any closer than the boundary." When danger presents itself, we take logical precautions to safeguard ourselves and ensure that the fatal danger remains at a safe distance.

When Moses set boundaries around Mount Sinai, he was taking action to protect the people from a horrible danger. The international community should learn from this example and act with greater vigor to thwart Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad recently [claimed](#) his country can create ten times more wealth from inventions than from oil, rendering Western economic sanctions powerless. He better hope so. According to the [Associated Press](#), Iran's income from oil has dropped by 45 percent as a result of sanctions, which have slowed the economy and disrupted foreign trade. In 2012, the national currency lost nearly 40 percent of its value. Recently, Iran's national currency has reached a new record low and lost close to an additional 10 percent of its value. However, reports show that Tehran continues its nuclear research program. [Reuters](#) reported that U.N. inspectors failed again to secure a breakthrough deal on Iran's atomic activity in a setback for diplomatic efforts to resolve the nuclear dispute with the Islamic state peacefully. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has not been granted the access they have long sought to the Parchin military site southeast of Tehran. The world must take concerted action now; time is running out to stop Iran's nuclear quest. If the West hopes to persuade Tehran to come into compliance with its obligations and cease its nuclear enrichment, the international community must dramatically step up pressure on the Islamic Republic. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Just as Moses kept the people of Israel safe from the danger of touching Mount Sinai, the international community must take concerted diplomatic action now to prevent a nuclear Iran. ■

Teaching the Young

You, your son and your daughters (Exodus 20:10)

אתה ובנך ובתך (שמות כ:י)

Traditionally, we are commanded to “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (20:7). Included in this commandment is the idea that “your son and your daughter” (20:10) must observe the tradition of Shabbat as well. Rashi (on 20:10) notes that verse encourages “the adults [to ensure] the rest of their children [on the Sabbath].” This is just one example of the many meaningful lessons and values we teach our children during their formative years that serve as a guide. If we teach our children beautiful traditions when they are young, they will carry these gifts with them throughout their lives.

Passing positive Jewish values to our children has sustained our people throughout history. Sadly, too many of Israel's neighbors are teaching their children negative values of hatred and violence.

All over the Middle East, hatred for Jews and Zionists is transmitted to Arab children as an integral part of their education. Ayaan Hirsi Ali wrote in [The New York Times](#), “Mainstream educational television programs are consistently anti-Semitic...Jews are variously compared to pigs, donkeys, rats and cockroaches.” In the Arab world, “those Muslims who think of Jews as friends and fellow human beings with a right to their own state are a minority, and are under intense pressure to change their minds.” Egypt's newly elected president, Mohamed Morsi, was caught on tape urging his followers to “nurse our children and our grandchildren on hatred” for Jews and Zionists. In a recent [interview](#) senior Hamas commander Zaher Jabarin claimed that Hamas educates Palestinian children in Gaza about the glories of suicide bombers. “The Palestinian youngsters, the resistance and Jihad warriors, fight and quarrel over performing a courageous suicide operation,” he said. According to the [New Jersey Jewish News](#), Itamar Marcus, founder and director of Palestinian Media Watch, described Palestinian Authority, “textbooks, children's shows, and even summer camps that glorify terrorists, demonize Israelis, and erase Israel from maps.” Sadly, the much desired peace between Israel and the Palestinians will remain elusive as long as much of the mainstream Arab world continues to teach its children to hate.

While Judaism encourages us to teach our children spiritual values, unfortunately, many of Israel's neighbors teach their children to hate, dimming the prospects for a lasting peace. ■