



Sermon Tidbits

APRIL 29, 2013

Parashat Behar-Bechukotai

A Strong Partner

Then you shall uphold him (Leviticus 25:35)

והחזקת בו (ויקרא כה:לה)

Describing the obligation to help an individual in need, we are commanded to “uphold him” (25:35). What is the meaning of this unusual phrase? In his famous delineation of the eight levels of charity, Maimonides (Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10:7) explained that the highest level of assistance “is one who maintains with his hands an Israelite who has fallen [on difficult times], and gives him a gift, or loan, or enters into a partnership or offers him employment in order to strengthen him so that he does not require the assistance of others.” In other words, the greatest level, above which there is no greater, is to strengthen a partner until he is no longer dependent upon others.

By partnering with Israel in a manner that helps the Jewish state protect itself without the need for outside assistance, the United States is fulfilling the commandment to “uphold” a friend in the greatest possible way.

During his first visit to Israel as U.S. Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel said that the United States is “committed to providing Israel with whatever support is necessary for Israel to maintain military superiority over any state or coalition of states and non-state actors.” Over the course of the visit Hagel met with Israeli officials including Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon, and also [stated](#) that, “it is Israel’s right to decide for itself whether to attack Iran to stop it from building a nuclear bomb.” After his meeting with Ya’alon, Hagel reaffirmed the Obama administration’s dedication to “not just maintaining, but enhancing and improving Israel’s qualitative military edge [as] a top priority.” Hagel added that he and President Obama are committed to the strength and security of Israel “and deepening the historic security cooperation between our nations.” In order to preserve Israel’s qualitative military edge in the Mideast, Hagel said the U.S. will permit Israel to buy various new weapons, including U.S. missiles and advanced radars for its strike aircraft. The sale is designed to ensure that Israel has the capability to deter and counter the security risks throughout the region. Included in the sale are advanced radar systems for F-15 fighter jets; KC-135 tankers: aircraft that can refuel other planes midair; and HARM anti-radiation missiles, which fired from a fighter jet can destroy opposition air-defense missiles. In addition, Israel is the first country America has authorized to receive the V-22 Osprey, a military plane that can take off, land and fly as either a plane or a helicopter. For more on the U.S.-Israel relationship, click [here](#).

Maimonides explained that partnering with someone in a way that enables them to be independent is the greatest form of assistance possible. The United States offers just this kind of support, providing the Jewish state the military hardware critical to protect and defend the people of Israel. ■

L’chaim!

And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage (Leviticus 26:4)

והשיג לכם דיש את בציר (ויקרא כו:ד)

The Torah makes a direct association between agricultural success and peace. Immediately following the verse outlining great agricultural blessing we read, “And I will give peace in the Land” (26:5). An abundant harvest, and specifically the growing of grapes, was long considered the greatest symbol of Jewish prosperity and national

tranquility. The prophet Micah envisioned an age in which, “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Micah 4:3). In that time, every man “shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid” (4:4).

The ancient prophets considered the growing of grapes for wine to be a symbol of prosperity and stability. Today, Israel’s growing wine industry is a testament to the Jewish state’s economic stability.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Golan Heights Winery, whose expertise, technology, management and innovation brought world-class winemaking to the Jewish state. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), since the winery won its first major international award in 1987, when the Yarden Cabernet Sauvignon 1984 won the Winiarski Trophy and Gold Medal at the International Wines & Spirits Competition in London, “the winery has been the Israel flag waver at international competitions, winning major awards all over the world.” Moreover, it paved the way for the extensive growth of wineries that followed. According to [Israel21c](#), over the last 18 years, the number of boutique wineries in Israel has leapt exponentially, attracting international attention and acclaim. Oded Shoham of the Israel Wine Experience said that, “Until 1995, there were just seven boutique wineries in Israel. By 2000, we had 100. Today, there are between 280 and 300.” Sales of Israeli wines stand at \$315 million per year and the country exports some \$30 million worth of wine annually. Frank Prial, wine critic and columnist of *The New York Times* writes, “Once, recommendation of Israel wines was mostly of a sentimental nature. That is no longer necessary.”

The prophet Micah’s blessings included peace, prosperity, and the ability to “sit under a vine.” The growth and acclaim of Israel’s present wineries serve as a testament to the stability and economic vitality of the Jewish state. ■

Sword of Vengeance

Execute the vengeance of the covenant (Leviticus 26:25)

נקמת נקם ברית (ויקרא כו:כה)

During his disturbing rebuke of the nation, Moses warned that should they abandon the precepts of the Torah, they would be punished with a sword that would, “execute the vengeance of the covenant” (26:25). What is a sword of vengeance? Netziv of Volozhin (see Ma’ayanah shel Torah vol. 3 p. 163) explains that when a monarch conquers a country, he has no particular interest in punishing its inhabitants, even if they fought against him. However, if his own people rise up against him and rebel, even after he quells the rebellion “he brutally punishes these citizens, for they swore allegiance as citizens, and their rebellion represents criminal treason.”

According to Netziv, a ruler will intentionally punish citizens who rebel against him in an overly harsh manner. The Assad regime in Syria is now actualizing Netziv’s message by using chemical weapons on the Syrian people.

The White House recently said that the nation’s intelligence agencies assessed “with varying degrees of confidence” that the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had used chemical weapons, [The New York Times](#) reported. Prior to this report, British and French reports indicated that Assad had used chemical weapons and the IDF announced that it concluded sarin gas has been used by the Syrian regime. This statement came just as Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel was concluding his recent visit in Israel, and only the day after Hagel stated that Syria’s use of chemical weapons would cross the red line set by President Barack Obama and would be a “game-changer.” At first, both Hagel and Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the U.S. did not yet have reliable evidence to support this conclusion, but U.S. administration later reported that it concluded sarin gas had indeed been used on a small scale. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

According to Netziv, rulers intentionally dole out harsh punishments when their citizen rebel. Sadly, the Assad regime has proved Netziv correct, ostensibly using chemical weapons against rebels fighting to overthrow the regime. ■

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