

MAY 13, 2013

Shavuot and Parashat Naso

Economic Hardship (Shavuot)

Is this Naomi? (Ruth 1:19)

הזאת נעמי (רות א:יט)

The book of Ruth opens with Naomi's family leaving the land of Israel during a time of famine. The Sages (see Yalkut Shimoni) note that the family left Bethlehem because they wanted to preserve their wealth instead of supporting their needy neighbors. However, Naomi's fortune in Moab took a turn for the worse, as she lost her husband, both sons, and her family fortune. Upon her return to Bethlehem, her former friends hardly recognized her exclaiming "Is that Naomi?" Naomi accepted responsibility for her plight telling the people "I went out full, and the Lord has brought me back home empty" (1:21). Rashi explains that Naomi recognized that her economic hardship represented a punishment for her selfish behavior during the famine.

Naomi accepted that her economic suffering was a direct result of her actions and was able to take the steps to change course. Iran must make this same conclusion. It must end its nuclear weapons research and be relieved of the biting economic sanctions stifling its economy.

Since 2007, the United States has worked with the U.N. Security Council to pass four sets of increasingly tough sanctions on Iran targeting Iranian entities involved in Tehran's nuclear, missile and conventional weapons programs. The European Union, Japan, Australia, Canada, South Korea and other U.S. allies have adopted further measures beyond the U.N. sanctions. Combined with American efforts, these international sanctions are having a dramatic impact on the Iranian economy and are causing increased political division within Iran. Iran's currency, the rial, has lost nearly 80 percent of its value in the last two years as the country has been cut off from the international financial system. The devaluation of the currency has led to rampant inflation, and unemployment, already high, is growing. Moreover, Iran will soon face additional economic pressure. The National Defense Authorization Act, which comes into effect on July 1, blacklists Iran's shipping, shipbuilding, energy and ports management sectors. According to [Reuters](#), "Foreign container shipping lines are giving up on Iranian business ahead of new U.S. sanctions in July, dealing a further blow to Tehran's vital seaborne trade." Still, the biting economic measures have yet to coerce Iran to curtail its nuclear program, as Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability may be entering its final stages. Tehran is now installing advanced centrifuges that can quadruple uranium enrichment. The Obama Administration must fully enforce existing sanctions and ensure use of every diplomatic and economic tool to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program. Congress must likewise ensure that U.S. financial and political sanctions are implemented and enforced stringently. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Naomi understood that her selfishness led to her downfall and she was able to change her ways. Hopefully, Iran can also recognize that in order avoid further economic suffering it must halt its illicit nuclear weapons program. ■

A Blessing of Peace

And give you peace (Numbers 6:26)

וישמ לך שלום (במדבר ו:כו)

Midrash Agadah explains that the peace described in the priestly blessing means that "Even [Israel's] enemies will make peace." Noting that peace represents the final phrase of the blessing, Midrash Rabbah comments: "Rabbi Simon

ben Chalafta said, 'Great is peace, for there is no greater vessel of blessing than peace, as it is written, The Lord will bless his people with peace' (Psalms 29:11). Even the priestly blessing concludes with peace...to teach us that the [other] blessings are worth nothing without unless peace is together with them..."

The greatest blessing the priests give us is the blessing of living in peace and tranquility. Recently, an Israeli leader was honored for his efforts to promote peace between Israel and the countries that surround the Jewish state.

Israeli President Shimon Peres received "Honorary Citizenship of Peace" of the city of Assisi. [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported Peres was honored at an award ceremony and also received the key to the city. Assisi Mayor Claudio Ricci, who made the presentation, told Peres that he was the first recipient of honorary citizenship of peace. The city of Assisi is a symbol of peace in Italy. Assisi was the birthplace of Saint Francis, the patron saint who dedicated his life to peace. Ricci [told](#) President Peres that, "The city of Assisi sees in you, Shimon Peres, as a promoter of the values of peace and dialogue. We know that peace is complicated, that it is not easy to achieve but peace is a way of life, a fulfillment of hope and you, Mr. President, are an exemplary role model." In response, Peres thanked his hosts for the award and called for cooperation between faiths for the sake of peace, "We have to pray together for the end of the terrible bloodshed in our region, and make the region a place where people walk together hand in hand."

The priestly blessings conclude with a blessing of peace, teaching us the overarching importance of this critical value. Today, Israeli leaders continue to serve as role models who seek peace for both Israel and her neighbors. ■

Working Together

And the Levites shall pitch camp around... (Numbers 1:53)

והלויים יחנו סביב (במדבר א:נג)

When the princes brought their offerings to consecrate the Tabernacle, every prince from each of the twelve tribes brought identical gifts. Yet, they brought their offerings not on 12 individual wagons, but instead on "six covered wagons...a wagon for every two of the princes..." (1:3). S'forno notes that they shared the wagons "as a sign of brotherhood between them." Rabbi Shalom Meir Volk (see Ma'ayan Hashavua vol. 4 p. 86) adds that they specifically and intentionally shared the wagons to demonstrate that "together they bore the burden and sense of responsibility to the entire community."

The princes brought their gifts on shared wagons to demonstrate their commitment to work together to support their people. Similarly, the United States and Israel work together to maintain stability in an increasingly unstable region.

Early this month Israeli jets attacked a Syrian military installation in order to prevent the transfer of sophisticated rocket systems to Hezbollah in Lebanon. A spokesman for President Obama [reiterated Israel's right to defend itself](#) against weapons that could pose a threat to its civilians. The spokesman, voicing support for Israel's actions, emphasized that the United States is working closely with its ally on this issue. "What I have said in the past and I continue to believe is that the Israelis justifiably have to guard against the transfer of advanced weaponry to terrorist organizations like Hezbollah," he said. "We coordinate closely with the Israelis recognizing they are very close to Syria, they are very close to Lebanon." With no other country in the region does the U.S. share the same high level of strategic cooperation. American-Israeli cooperation begins with frequent strategic dialogues among political and military leaders and extends to military planning and exercises, intelligence-sharing and technological development. The network of American and Israeli military and intelligence coordination has provided a powerful deterrent to those in the Middle East who seek to harm either country. For more on the U.S.-Israel relationship, click [here](#).

The princes deliberately shared the wagons used to offer their gifts to demonstrate the importance of working together on behalf of their people. The United States and Israel have emulated the princes' model, working closely together to fight terrorism and ensure stability in a volatile Middle East. ■

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