

MAY 27, 2013

Parashat Shelach

Tainted Leadership

Men who were heads of the children of Israel (Numbers 13:3) (אנשים ראשי בני ישראל המה (במדבר יג:ג))

According to S'fat Emet (Sh'lach Lecha, 5739), while the spies claimed to be acting in the best interest of the nation, their negative report was in fact motivated by a desire for personal gain. "The Zohar states that the spies thought: 'Here, (in the desert,) we are heads (of the Children of Israel); in the Land (of Israel) we will not merit to be heads.'" The spies realized that when the nation entered the Land of Israel, a new leadership would arise. Feeling that they would lose their positions of leadership, they issued a negative report in hopes of sabotaging the mission.

Like the spies, who claimed the peoples' best interest but really only looked after themselves, Iran's leadership, which also claims to act on behalf of the Iranian people, seems similarly motivated by selfish desires.

A clerical committee in Iran that is responsible for vetting presidential candidates for the country's upcoming election recently barred two important contenders from the ballot. This is part of a campaign to guarantee that the next head of government will be loyal to the regime of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. According to [The Guardian](#), one of the barred contenders was accused of putting Iran ahead of Islam and not showing enough loyalty to the supreme leader. According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), Iran's Guardian Council disqualified former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei from running. While Mashaei's rejection was expected as he represents a continuation of Ahmadinejad's now unpopular policies, many reformers and supporters of the Green Movement, including youth, students and women, had rallied behind Rafsanjani when he registered to run, saying he was the best-available choice—and many were shocked by his disqualification. U.S. State Department Spokesman Patrick Ventrell said "The lack of transparency makes it unlikely that the slate of candidates represents the will of the Iranian people, who should be given every opportunity to choose a president who best embodies their views." For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The spies claimed to care for the people's welfare but in reality only cared for themselves. Similarly, Iran's clerical leaders will only allow their citizens a democratic choice if their choice represents the leaders' own best interests. ■

An Inherited Land

We should go up at once, and possess it (Numbers 13:30) (עלה נעלה וירשנו אותה (במדבר יג:ל))

S'fat Emet (see his commentary on Shelach 5647) translates *veyarashnu* to mean "and we will inherit" the Land. He writes "For the Land of Israel was given to the Children of Israel in the merit of the forefathers as it was promised to them from the Holy One..." Rabbi Arye Hendler explains, "The rest of the spies thought that the nation was preparing to conquer a new place...but Caleb came and said, "We should go up at once, and possess it not as new immigrants, rather by the rights of inheritance through the forefathers."

Caleb recognized the Jewish nation's ancient connection to the Promised Land. Today, the state of Israel represents the renewal of the ancient link between the people of Israel and the Land of Israel.

Israel's Declaration of Independence—signed 65 years ago—opens with the following preamble: “The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped.” Ultimately vanquished by invading armies and expelled from their homeland, those who fled under expulsion and the generations that followed never lost faith in their desire to return to Israel, the land of their forefathers and foremothers. They never lost hope of one day returning to their ancient capital of Jerusalem—a city mentioned more than 800 times in the Bible and thousands of times in more than 2,000 years of rabbinic literature. Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses. Pioneers, defiant returnees, and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, hoping for peace while knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood. For more on Israel today, click [here](#).

For centuries, the Jewish people have maintained an intimate connection with their ancestral homeland. Just as Caleb and Joshua, so many years ago, returned to Land of Israel, modern Israel represents the long-held dream to return and inherit the legacy that our forefathers left for us. ■

Confidence to Overcome

For we are well able to overcome it (Numbers 13:30)

כי יכול נוכל לה (במדבר יג:ל)

Sent by Moses to spy out the Promised Land and report on the nation's military mission, the spies returned with a depressing report emphasizing the strength of their adversaries. Without explicitly saying so, the spies essentially told the nation, “We can't win.” As a direct response to their defeatism, Caleb told the people, “We should go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (13:30). Rabbi Dr. Tamir Granot explains that Caleb's confidence stemmed from a belief in the inner strength of the nation itself. “[Caleb told the people]: We ourselves [can win], and not with divine miracles...a faith that if we are here, and God chose us and sent us here, then we must have the necessary strength [to succeed]...this is a confidence in our inner strength, and not a faith in external salvation.”

Caleb voiced confidence in the Jewish nation's ability to overcome its adversaries. With the Middle East in turmoil, we must encourage our elected officials to pass crucial legislation that will express confidence in the Jewish state by providing important military equipment for Israel to use in a potential crisis.

Among the provisions of the pending United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2013 is a provision that “expands authority for forward-deployed U.S. weapons stockpiles in Israel, providing important military equipment for either to use in a crisis.” The volatile situation in Syria highlights the need for essential military equipment to meet current and projected strategic threats. Recently, Russian President Vladimir Putin rejected Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's [diplomatic efforts](#) and [sent a shipment](#) of advanced antiship cruise missiles to Syria. These additional capabilities represent a major threat to Israeli forces. Israeli Air Force Commander Major General Amir Eshel [expressed](#) confidence in Israel's ability to address Syrian military threats. “In 2013, we can win wars...we will have to employ greater flexibility, with more intensity and in a short amount of time. We can win and it will require massive firepower.” American efforts to bolster Israel's arsenal should it be needed on short notice could play a major role in Israel's ability to quickly overcome Syria's advanced defense systems. The United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2013 will ensure that Israel has the stockpiles on hand should the need ever arise. This important legislation will also declare that Israel is a “major strategic partner” of the U.S. as well as seek to find ways for Israel to join the Visa Waiver Program, promote cooperation in such fields as energy, water, homeland security, and agriculture, encourage the enhancement of scientific collaboration between the two countries and continue American assistance for the Iron Dome rocket defense system. For more on The United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2013, click [here](#).

Just as Caleb expressed confidence in the Jews' ability to overcome their adversaries, strong American support has conveyed similar confidence in Israel's ability to protect its citizens in a potential crisis. ■