

JUNE 10, 2013

Parashat Chukat

A Man of Action

And they mourned for Aaron thirty days (Numbers 20:29) (ויבכו את אהרן שלשים יום (במדבר כ:כט))

According to the text, the nation mourned the death of Aaron for an extended 30 day mourning period. Rashi explains that the phrase, “all the house of Israel” (20:29) teaches us that both the men and women mourned the death of Aaron. Why was his loss so profoundly felt by the nation? Rashi (on 20:29) quotes from the famous Midrash that Aaron was “a lover of peace and a chaser of peace” who strove to bring peace in homes and communities. Pirkei D’rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 17) adds that Aaron “would walk through the camp each day” in order to do this. The nation mourned Aaron not only for his peaceful ways, but for his tireless efforts on their behalf.

Aaron was remembered not only as a man of peace, but also as a selfless worker who constantly sought ways to help the people of Israel. Recently, America mourned the passing of a great friend of the Jewish state, who emulated Aaron’s tireless efforts on others’ behalf.

The pro-Israel community recently mourned the passing of Senator Frank Lautenberg—a tireless champion for the U.S.-Israel relationship and the human rights of Jews and persecuted peoples throughout the world. Senator Lautenberg’s leadership will be sorely missed because of his passion and effectiveness in taking a stand for America’s democratic ally and human rights. He consistently and persistently made his voice heard in defense of Israel. Senator Lautenberg stood up for the Jewish community of the Soviet Union when it suffered in the darkness of tyranny and assisted its liberation into the light of freedom. Although he is no longer with us, Senator Lautenberg’s legacy of commitment to the Jewish people and human rights will long endure. Senator Lautenberg loved Israel and visited frequently. In addition, the Senator consistently supported Israel’s right to self-defense, and, according to [The Jerusalem Post](#), felt that helping Israel and America were one and the same.

Although Senator Lautenberg is no longer with us, his commitment to the Jewish people will live on. Like Aaron, he left a legacy of action and a tireless commitment to the well-being of the Jewish people. ■

Words of Incitement

Our souls loathe this light bread (Numbers 21:5) (ונפשנו קצה בלחם הקלקל (במדבר כא:ה))

When the nation complained after being forced to extend their journey in order to circumvent the territory of Edom, they were punished harshly and attacked by venomous snakes. Why were they punished in such a severe manner? Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neria, in his work *Ner LaMaor* (p. 360) explains that they were punished because their complaints were simply an excuse to incite the people against Moses’ leadership. “If you say to them, ‘Here is bread,’ they respond, ‘This bread isn’t bread! Our souls loathe this light bread.’ Incitement for the sake of incitement—[is] a venom that flows in their essence. In every area they only see the negative, and as a result, are never satisfied.”

The negativity and incitement of the complainers represented a grave danger to the nation’s future. Today, Palestinian hatred and incitement against Israel represents a similar danger to the parties’ aspirations to achieve peace.

While both the United States and Israel have launched major efforts to renew the peace process with the Palestinian Authority, those efforts have not been reciprocated by the Palestinians who continue to insist on preconditions before returning to talks with Israel. [Israel Hayom](#) reported that the Palestinians fail to demonstrate a serious commitment to peace, as they extoll violence, elevate those who perpetrate violence against Israel, and glorify those who commit terrorist acts against innocent Israelis. Recently, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas [appointed](#) Hussein Fayyad as an adviser. Fayyad is one of the commanders of a 1978 terror attack that killed 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children. Palestinian incitement also continues, with official government outlets delegitimizing the Jewish state and teaching children to hate Israel and Jews. Moreover, a senior PA official and former adviser to Abbas, Sultan Abu Al-Einein, recently expressed support for a Palestinian terrorist, Salam Al-Zaghal, who stabbed to death an Israeli civilian in April. “We salute the heroic fighter, the self-sacrificing Salam Al-Zaghal,” Al-Einein said. Giving his first security assessment as Israel’s Defense Minister, Moshe Yaalon told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that “Peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians could be signed on paper, but as long as the Palestinians still educate their youth to hate Israelis, the peace ‘will blow up in our faces.’” For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

The complainers in the desert remind us that negativity, hatred and incitement is a recipe for failure. The Palestinians must take this message to heart as they claim to desire peace while extolling violence and inciting hatred. ■

Making Every Effort

And Israel sent messengers to Sihon (Numbers 21:21) (במדבר כא:כא) וישלח ישראל מלאכים אל סיחון

On the Israelis’ march to Canaan, Moses sent a message to Sihon, King of the Amorites asking permission to traverse the country in peace. The Amorites not only refused; they massed an army and attacked, only to be defeated by the Jewish forces. Nahmanides (on 21:21) contends that Moses, without divine prompting, initiated the contact with the Amorites because he truly preferred not to fight, hoping to concentrate the entire Jewish population not in Amorite land on the east bank of the Jordan River, but to the west of the Jordan. Nahmanides writes, “He desired that they [only] conquer [land] across the [Jordan] river so that they would dwell together.” Moses made every effort to avoid confrontation with the Amorite people, hoping for a peaceful pass through to the Promised Land.

Just as Moses made a sincere and strong effort to avoid armed confrontation with the Amorites, the United States continues to make every effort to avoid armed confrontation with Iran over its dangerous nuclear program.

Time and time again, the United States has clearly articulated that it will not tolerate Iran achieving nuclear weapons. Last year, President Obama [said](#), “We will not countenance Iran getting a nuclear weapon. My policy is not containment; my policy is to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon.” Speaking in Jerusalem in March, President Obama warned Iran that the U.S. will “do what is necessary” to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. “All options are on the table,” Obama [said](#). Despite all options being on the table, the United States continues to make every effort to resolve the standoff through diplomacy and economic sanctions. President Obama recently issued a new executive order strengthening U.S. sanctions. This action responds to Iran’s continuing progress in its nuclear program and refusal to engage in constructive negotiations. The President’s action demonstrates American resolve to escalate economic pressure on Iran to persuade Tehran to halt its nuclear weapons quest. The new measure authorizes sanctions on foreign financial institutions that deal in Iranian currency, provide goods or services to the Iranian automotive sector or provide material support to sanctioned Iranian entities. The Treasury and State Departments have increased sanction enforcement focusing on companies and entities attempting to evade U.S. sanctions on Iran’s energy and transportation sectors. These efforts have had a significant impact on Iran’s economy: crude oil exports have [dropped to their lowest level](#) in decades. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Moses took concrete action hoping to avoid armed confrontation with the Amorites. The United States, following in Moses’ footsteps, is making a meaningful effort to avoid confrontation, hoping that economic sanctions can coerce Iran to abandon its illegal and reckless effort to build a nuclear weapon. ■