

JUNE 24, 2013

Parashat Pinchas

Peace and Security

My covenant of peace (Numbers 25:12)

את בריתי שלום (במדבר כה:יב)

Ibn Ezra (on 25:12) explains that since Pinchas had killed Zimri, a tribal leader, it was possible that someone would try to exact revenge. Therefore, Pinchas was blessed with a covenant of peace as a way of guaranteeing him safety. Alternatively, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein suggests (on 25:12) that by committing this act of violence, even though it was justified, it was possible that Pinchas could have been internally affected. Rabbi Lichtenstein therefore interprets the covenant of peace to be internal, ensuring that Pinchas stayed on his “desired path of peace.” Both explanations complement one-another. Once Pinchas was safe, he could then focus on returning to his inner peace.

Recognizing the logic inherent in Pinchas’ experience, the United States has taken significant measures over the years to help keep Israel safe as it works towards peace with its neighbors.

For years Israel has declared its desire to reach a comprehensive agreement with the Palestinian people and support a future Palestinian state. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu recently [reaffirmed his commitment](#) to the two-state solution saying, “Foreign policy is shaped by the prime minister and my view is clear. I will seek a negotiated settlement where you’d have a demilitarized Palestinian state that recognizes the Jewish state.” Twice in the past four decades the United States has helped broker a peace accord between Israel and an Arab partner through direct, bilateral negotiations. At the same time, U.S. assistance has helped Israel to remain strong militarily, allowing it to take risks for peace with the Palestinians as well as sign the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. These states, and many others in the Arab world, have come to understand that an Israel allied with America cannot be destroyed. When its security requirements are being addressed and when the United States is backing its efforts, Israel will be more confident and secure if it is asked to take irreversible risks for peace in exchange for potentially reversible Palestinian promises. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

In order to achieve inner peace, Pinchas first needed to feel secure from outside attack. Thankfully, the United States continues to work to ensure that Israel feels safe, helping the Jewish state make strides for peace. ■

Pretext of Friendship

By their wiles with which they beguiled you (Numbers 25:18)

בנכליהם אשר נכלו לכם (במדבר כה:יח)

The Midrash explains that the prophet Balaam suggested to the Midianites that the only way to defeat the Jews was by enticing them to sin. They almost succeeded, and as a response Moses was commanded to attack and harass the Midianites for their trickery in instigating the Jewish people to sin and worship the idolatry of Ba’al Peor. Rabbi Simcha Raz explains (see Shivim Panim L’Torah vol. 4 p. 167) that “while they spoke of peace, flattery and friendship,” they actually hoped to use that friendship in their attempt to destroy the Jewish nation.

Like the Midianites who spoke of friendship but acted with hostility, Iran’s newly elected president speaks of reconciliation with the West, but his actions thus far indicate a different agenda.

Iran elected a new president, regime loyalist and former nuclear negotiator Hassan Rouhani. As Rouhani has promised better relations with the West, he has also strongly backed the continuation of Iran's nuclear program. In his first post-election news conference, Rouhani made crystal clear that he had no intention of pressing for a suspension of Iran's uranium enrichment program. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu cautioned the world not to be deluded by Rouhani. "Wishful thinking is not a substitute for policy. The new Iranian president has been very clear. He is the author of a doctrine. You could call it 'talk and enrich,' that is 'talk and continue to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons.'" To mend ties with the West, talk will not suffice. Iran must comply with its international obligations, including ending its nuclear weapons quest. The international community should provide sanctions relief only after Tehran takes concrete positive steps to halt its nuclear activities. Until that time, the United States should maintain a steady policy that couples a genuine willingness to negotiate with increased sanctions pressure. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The Midianites hoped to use words of friendship as a pretext to harm the Jewish nation. While Iran's new president has spoken of moderation, his actions indicate that he too hopes to use words of friendship to lull the world into complacency, giving Iran the time it needs to complete its nuclear weapons program. ■

Two Forms of Leadership

Who may go out before them (Numbers 27:17)

אשר יצא לפניהם (במדבר כז:יז)

Realizing that his years of leadership were nearing a close, Moses beseeched God to choose a new leader to take his place. The proper leader would "go out before them and who may come in before them" (27:17). The Midrash (Sifrei) comments on this quality and explains that Jewish military leaders, who lead their followers on the battlefield, were "unlike the kings of the nations of the world who sit in their homes and send their soldiers to war." Proper leaders put the needs and safety of their followers first, while improper leaders worry only about themselves, often putting others in danger.

Moses described the characteristics of a proper leader, emphasizing the importance of putting their citizen's best interests first. Unfortunately, many of the leaders in Israel's neighboring countries often act in the exact opposite manner—endangering their citizens to further their own interests.

In democracies, free and fair elections ensure that leaders act in the best interest of their citizens or suffer defeat at the polls. In contrast, in too many Arab regimes, "elections" return the same dictatorial leaders to power leaving them free to abuse their citizens. In Syria, President Bashar Assad has systematically murdered tens of thousands of his own citizens in the name of "security." Whether through the use of conventional or chemical weapons, Assad has willingly sacrificed his country at the altar of civil war rather than stepping down and avoiding mass murder and bloodshed. In Gaza and Lebanon, the terrorist leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah regularly hide behind civilian populations when they attack Israel. They stock weapons in civilian areas and fire from schools and hospitals, counting on the negative press that Israel will receive when innocent civilians are killed after Israel is forced to defend itself. In Iran, a fanatic regime devoted to acquiring nuclear weapons has rebuffed the will of the international community and suffered the sting of biting economic sanctions. Iran's economy has shrunk dramatically over the past two years. Oil exports have sunk to new lows, its currency is in free fall, and food prices have skyrocketed—all as a result of a governing body more interested in achieving nuclear weapons than feeding its population. For more on Israel and its neighbors, click [here](#).

We're blessed to live in a country with leaders who live by Moses' instructions, placing the needs of their people first. The citizens of Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and Iran are far less fortunate, suffering at the hands of leaders who put their own desire for power ahead of the safety, prosperity and well-being of the people they are supposed to lead. ■

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