

JULY 8, 2013

Parashat Devarim

Playing with Gold

And Di-zahab (Deuteronomy 1:2)**ודי זהב (דברים א:ב)**

As the Torah delineates the exact location of the Children of Israel when Moses offered his final address to the nation, the text notes their proximity to other known locations: “Beyond the Jordan, in the wilderness, over against Suf, between Paran and Tofel and Laban and Hazeroth and Di-Zahab” (1:2). Rashi writes that as Moses intended to rebuke the nation for its mistakes in the desert, each of the locations mentioned alluded to a sin committed by the nation. Rashi (on 1:22) explains that in mentioning “di-Zahab” (*zahav* or gold), Moses “rebuked them for the calf that they made because of their excess gold...” Thus, Moses indirectly warned the nation that an abundance of gold could lead them to sin, just as an excess of gold led the nation to build an idolatrous golden calf.

An abundance of gold brought the Jewish nation to a situation that nearly destroyed them. Recent American sanctions will hopefully prevent Iran from using its gold to make a similar mistake.

While biting international sanctions have severely hampered Iran’s economy, the Islamic Republic’s abundance of gold has allowed it to circumvent international sanctions by paying with the precious metal, thereby avoiding the international banking system. The United States recently imposed additional sanctions aimed at halting gold trading with Iran to further tighten the economic grip in the Islamic regime and coerce it to halt its illicit and dangerous nuclear program. The sanctions expanded the number of penalized industries and imposed rules that could theoretically halt all currency and gold trading with Iran. According to [The New York Times](#), the sanctions “could deprive the Iranians of billions of dollars of income that has evaded earlier rounds [of sanctions]... Bullion dealers in other countries who flout the prohibitions risk severe American penalties, including expulsion from the United States precious metals market.” These new sanctions are the result of legislation signed into law by President Obama in January, as well as a presidential executive order signed in June. While the Obama Administration’s recent actions are encouraging, Iran has yet to demonstrate a willingness to curtail its nuclear research program. Congress must continue its efforts to further strengthen the sanctions in order to send a strong message to the Iranians that the United States will judge Iran not by conciliatory words, but by its actions. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Left with too much gold in ancient times, the Children of Israel built a dangerous idol. In modern times, the United States is working to make sure that Iran’s gold isn’t used to help it down its own dangerous path. ■

Tools and Shields

Behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron (Deuteronomy 3:11)**הנה ערשו ערש ברזל (דברים ג:יא)**

Of all the adversaries the Jewish nation faced in the desert, Og, the king of Bashan, was so intimidating that according to the Torah, God specifically instructed Moses to “Fear him not” (3:2). Moses described Og as so large that his “bedstead was a bedstead of iron... nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man.” Why did Moses describe his bedstead to relate his immense size? Chizkuni retranslates the text and explains that the word *araso* refers not to a bed, but to a fortification. “This is a language of a stronghold and

fortification...meaning that [Og] was surrounded by a wall as strong as iron..." According to this interpretation, Moses feared Og not for his great size, but because he was shielded by fortifications of great strength.

According to Chizkuni, Og's strength stemmed from his seemingly impenetrable fortifications. Today, the United States could help Israel to be prepared in case it must ever deal with a similar military challenge.

While Israel hopes that Iran will willingly curtail its nuclear weapons research program, it must also plan for the possibility of continued Iranian intransigence, forcing the Jewish state to take action. Yet, Iran's nuclear enrichment facilities lie deep under the granite mountain at Fordow, protected from conventional air assault. According to [USA Today](#), the U.S. "plans to give Israel weapons that would enable it to send ground forces against Iranian nuclear facilities that it can't penetrate from the air." The proposed arms sale includes air-refueling aircraft, advanced radars for F-15 fighter jets, and up to eight V-22 Ospreys, which can land like a helicopter and carry two dozen special operations forces with their gear over long distances at aircraft speeds. According to Kenneth Pollack, a former CIA analyst now at the Brookings Institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy, the Osprey "is the ideal platform for sending Israeli special forces into Iran." The weapons deal, part of a military aid package for Israel that includes \$1 billion for up to eight V-22 tilt-rotors; \$500 million to retrofit radars into F-15 fighters and another \$1 billion for a variety of air-to-ground weapons, represents another example of America's commitment to Israel's qualitative military edge. For more on the U.S-Israel relationship, click [here](#).

Og's shield protected him from attacks, thus making him a fearsome adversary. As Iran's nuclear enrichment facilities are similarly protected, the U.S. may provide Israel with equipment that could address this military challenge. ■

Redemption through Justice (Shabbat Chazon)

How the faithful city has become a harlot! (Isaiah 1:21) איכה היתה לזונה קרייה נאמנה (ישעיהו א:כא)

We call the Shabbat preceding Tisha B'av—the saddest day of the Jewish calendar—Shabbat Chazon, after the first word of the *haphtarah* read each year on this Shabbat. In the chapter, the prophet Isaiah lamented the great destruction that had befallen much of the Jewish nation. Isaiah focused on the deep spiritual decay that led to the nation's demise. The city of Jerusalem that had once been a city of righteousness had become a place where its leaders "love bribery and pursues payments" (1:23). Moreover, Isaiah explained that the nation would only merit redemption through the return of justice: "Then I will restore your judges as at first, and your counselors as at the beginning, after that you will be called, 'City of Righteousness'" (1:26-27).

Isaiah reminds us that the remedy for the tragedy of the exile can only come through justice. The state of Israel, a country built upon ethics of honesty and justice, remembers this lesson as it adheres to the rule of law.

The United States recently celebrated its independence, marking the day that our founding fathers proclaimed a country dedicated to liberty, freedom and equality. Since its birth, the United States has served as a beacon of freedom, fairness and justice, spreading these critical values to countries across the globe. A couple of centuries later, Israel was founded on the core values of democracy, the rule of law, freedom of religion and speech, and human rights. Like the U.S., Israel was founded by refugees seeking political and religious freedoms. Israel, like the U.S., has absorbed waves of immigrants seeking political and economic freedom, and has evolved into a democracy that respects the rule of law, the will of voters and the rights of minorities. Moreover, in stark contrast to other Middle East nations, Israel has an independent judicial system which protects the rights of individuals and operates under the principle of "innocent until proven guilty," and regularly schedules free and fair elections open to all its citizens, regardless of religion, race or sex. For more on Israel today, click [here](#).

On Tisha B'av, we mourn the destruction of Jerusalem that was precipitated by the abandonment of justice. But, we can also be proud that the modern state of Israel is guided by the core values of fairness, freedom and democracy. ■

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