

AUGUST 19, 2013

Parashat Ki Tavo

New Leader, Same Story

And we cried out (Deuteronomy 26:7)**ונצעק (דברים כו:ז)**

The Sages, when writing the text of the Passover Haggadah, utilized the short narrative of the Exodus that appears at the beginning of Ki Tavo called *mikra bikkurim*, or the reading of the first fruits (26:5-10). In the Haggadah we note that the phrase “and we cried out,” is directly related to another, earlier verse, “And it came to pass in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died; and the Children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried” (Exodus 2:23). Why did they cry specifically after the death of the Egyptian king? Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach, in his commentary on the Haggadah, explains that “when they saw after the death of the king that [their burden] was not lessened...and the second [king] increased [their suffering], then they sighed a great sigh.”

When the Israelites recognized that the new Egyptian leader was no better than the first one, they cried out in horror and anguish. A similar sigh could be expected now as Iran’s new president continues to follow his predecessor’s quest for the most dangerous weapons known to man.

In a recent op-ed in [The Wall Street Journal](#), Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Representative Eliot Engel (D-NY) argue that following the election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, the United States must vigorously pursue increased economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic and take immediate steps to increase the pain of sanctions, which is the only way to persuade the Iranian leadership to change course. They write, “In the end, Mr. Rouhani won. Though the word ‘moderate’ often precedes his name in news stories, Iran’s new president is no reformer. For more than two decades, he served as the supreme leader’s personal representative to Iran’s national security council. The council oversees a range of illicit activities—from cracking down on student protestors at home to supporting terrorist groups, like Hezbollah, abroad. During a 2004 speech Mr. Rouhani boasted about how his rope-a-dope negotiating strategy with the West enabled Iran to stall while advancing its nuclear program.” In fact Rouhani recently [appointed](#) Mostafa Purmohammadi—who allegedly played a leading role in the 1988 Death Commissions that ordered the executions of thousands of political prisoners—as Iran’s new Justice Minister. According to [The Washington Post](#), Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cautioned a group of U.S. lawmakers not to be misled by Rouhani’s false diplomatic rhetoric. “He knows how to exploit this,” said Netanyahu. “While everybody is busy talking to him, he’ll be busy enriching uranium.” For more Iran, click [here](#).

While the Children of Israel only had the ability to cry out when they realized that the new Pharaoh wanted the same things as his predecessor, the international community has the ability to act. It must ensure that under no circumstances can Rouhani complete his predecessor’s mission and make Iran’s nuclear ambitions a reality. ■

Renewing the Agreement

This day (Deuteronomy 26:16)**היום הזה (דברים כו:טז)**

Moses declared, “This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances” (26:16). What day was Moses referring to? Rashi explains that Moses referred not to his time, but to ours—and teaches us to renew and refresh our covenant with God on a daily basis. “On every day, [the commandments] should be like new in your eyes,

as if you were commanded [to keep] them on that day.” Covenants have true meaning when they inspire a sense of renewal and continuity; we adhere to them because upholding these past agreements carries meaning for us today.

We make agreements meaningful when we work to uphold them. The Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty carries such meaning today as the two countries work daily to maintain the peace that has reigned on the Sinai border for decades.

Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system recently intercepted a grad rocket bound for the Israeli city of Eilat, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. An al-Qaeda-linked group in the Sinai Peninsula claimed responsibility for the attack, saying, “Jews will pay the price.” Warning sirens sounded over the Red Sea resort—crowded with tourists at the height of the summer vacation season—at around 1 a.m. in response to the incoming rocket. Booms were heard shortly thereafter, as Iron Dome was successfully deployed. The terrorist group claims that they fired the rocket in response to a recent Israeli drone strike inside Egyptian territory. According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), the “action in the Sinai Peninsula—which Egyptian officials denied, and which Israeli officials neither confirmed nor denied—would be the clearest manifestation of the high-level interaction between Israeli and Egyptian military and intelligence chiefs, according to the Western officials.” This type of cooperation between Egypt and Israel, “has increased since last month’s ouster of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, these officials say.” According to [Fox News](#), “Israel and the temporary, military-backed government that took control when Morsi was arrested last month are both working to neutralize terrorists in the peninsula.” For more on Egypt, click [here](#).

Rashi reminds us that the most meaningful covenants are the ones that we consistently reinforce. Recent Israeli and Egyptian cooperation demonstrates the meaning in our time of the peace treaty signed decades ago. ■

Dubious Honor

But it shall come to pass, if you will not listen (Deuteronomy 28:15) והיה אם לא תשמע (דברים כח:טו)

The bulk of Parashat Ki Tavo is made up of Moses’ rebuke of the nation known as the *tochecha*, in which Moses described in horrifying detail the terrible suffering that the people would endure should they abandon the ways of the Torah. Throughout Jewish history the reading was so troubling that in many communities no one wanted to be called for the *aliyah*, leaving it to the official Torah reader. Writes Rabbi Joseph Prouser, “So feared was this scriptural passage, that some communities have a history of skipping the section entirely. Others have required the Torah reader to accept this *aliyah* as a condition of employment. Still others, instead of assigning so unseemly a text as a Torah “honor,” simply announced “*Yaamod mi she-yirtzeh*”—Let whoever wants it come forward!

For generations, Jews avoided the “honor” of any association with Jewish suffering. Unfortunately, it appears that in Palestinian society Jewish suffering is something to be lauded.

Israel recently initiated the release of 26 terrorists from its prisons in the hope of furthering a process that may lead to peace with the Palestinians. Many of these prisoners murdered Israelis, including one who struck a Holocaust survivor with repeated blows to the neck with axes. One released prisoner is a man who killed Ofra Moses and her son Tal when he threw a Molotov cocktail at their car. Israel’s bold prisoner release raises many questions. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is trying to construct a stable civic society in a future Palestinian state, yet he wants convicted felons to be released. Abbas mandated that his ambassadors refer to the prisoners as “freedom fighters”—a title that seemingly encourages young Palestinians to revere them as heroes or role models. Now is the time for Abbas to take his own step forward. The Palestinian leadership must be held accountable to create an environment for peace. He should educate his citizens about living in peace with Israelis rather than glorifying murderers. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Jews have long eschewed being called for the reading of the rebuke lest they be seen as honoring Jewish suffering. If the PA wants a stable society in a future Palestinian state, they too must avoid honoring those who have inflicted pain and suffering. ■