



Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 26, 2013

Parashat Netzavim-Vayelech

Doing the Opposite

That he bless himself in his heart (Deuteronomy 29:18)

והתברך בלבבו (דברים כט:יח)

Moses raised the possibility that a person, after hearing his stern, harsh warning against idolatry and paganism, would nonetheless ignore his admonition and “bless himself in his heart, saying: ‘I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.’” What does “bless himself in his heart” refer to? S’forno (on 28:18) explains that Moses was describing an individual who spoke one way, but acted in the opposite manner. “He will accept the curse with his mouth and bless himself in his heart to cancel [the curse].” Moses warned that this type of person—who spoke one way and did the opposite—was not worthy of forgiveness (see 28:19).

Moses warned against outwardly accepting a stern warning while inwardly defying at the same time. Yet this is what Iran is doing as it speaks of moderation, while its actions continue to follow a radical, dangerous path aimed at achieving nuclear weapons.

While E.U. foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton said that the P5+1 group, consisting of U.N. Security Council members and Germany is eager to restart diplomacy with Iran over its illicit nuclear program, Israeli officials continue to emphasize the importance of substantive actions over rhetoric. Israel has repeatedly warned that Tehran would try to use talks to buy more time for uranium enrichment. “We are skeptical in the extreme,” one Israeli official told [The Jerusalem Post](#) regarding a new round of talks, adding that there was no hope the talks would help “unless the Iranians feel the pressure is being upgraded.” As America looks to start negotiations with newly elected Iranian President Rouhani, it must not forget Tehran’s history of using talks to forestall pressure and continue its illicit activities. Last month, the House of Representatives resoundingly passed the Nuclear Iran Prevention Act of 2013 (H.R. 850), by a vote of 400 to 20. The bill is expected to be introduced in the Senate after the August recess. We must urge our senators to vote for this legislation, and send a clear message to the Iranian regime that it will be judged not by its words, but by the concrete actions it takes to curtail its nuclear program. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Moses’ harsh warning against the hypocrisy of agreeing verbally, but acting in defiance in secret, highlights the hypocrisy of an Iranian regime that talks of reconciliation while the nuclear centrifuges continue to spin. ■

Verbal Acceptance

And you shall return (Deuteronomy 30:2)

ושבת (דברים ל:ב)

The opening verses of chapter 30 (30:1-30:10) describe the process of reconciliation between God and the Jewish nation. While we are returned to the Promised Land, we also undergo a process of return—*teshuvah* (from the root *lashuv*—“to return”). *Teshuvah*, or repentance, reflects a return to our true selves, the people we were before we sinned. In the very first law in Maimonides’ Laws of Repentance (1:1) he explains that confession—a verbal admission of guilt—represents a critical step in the process of repentance. “Regarding all commandments of the Torah...when one repents and returns from his sin, he must confess...”

Verbally accepting the harsh truth is a critical step in the process of repentance, return and reconciliation. The recent admission of the U.N. Secretary General that the organization is indeed slanted against Israel raised hopes for a small step towards reforming the international body's anti-Israel bias. Sadly, the admission was short lived.

Numerous media outlets reported that in a candid conversation with Israeli students, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon admitted that the U.N. was biased against Israel. According to [Ynet](#), "Ban confirmed that there was a biased attitude towards the Israeli people and Israeli government, stressing that it was 'an unfortunate situation.'" Ban's comments initially raised hopes that the international organization was trying to come to terms with its well-documented history of anti-Israel bias. Yet, days later Ban denied making the comments. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), Ban denied reports that he told students during a Jerusalem visit that there is bias in the U.N. against Israel. At a press gathering in New York Ban said, "I don't think there is discrimination against Israel at the United Nations," adding that, "The Israeli government maybe raised this issue that there's some bias against Israel, but Israel is one of the 193 member states. Thus, Israel should have equal rights and opportunities without having any bias, any discrimination. That's a fundamental principle of the United Nations charter." A senior Israeli official later told [The Times of Israel](#), "We were disappointed when we saw these reported remarks. It's clear that Israel has been systematically discriminated against at the United Nations and the way to start dealing with that issue is first of all to recognize that there's a problem." For more on the U.N. and Israel, click [here](#).

In Maimonides' view, the U.N. Secretary General's initial admission of bias represented a critical stage of repentance. Sadly, following Ban Ki-Moon's subsequent denial, it seems clear that the U.N.'s anti-Israel bias will continue. ■

Gathering the Dispersed

And gather you from all the peoples (Deuteronomy 30:3)

וקבצך מכל העמים (דברים ל:ג)

After describing the terrible suffering the Jewish people would endure throughout the exile, Moses promised them that one day "the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples which the Lord your God has scattered you" (30:3). Traditionally, we allude to this theme of the "ingathering of the exiles" numerous times during daily prayers. In Ahavah Rabbah (typically recited before the Shema) we pray, "Bring us in peace from the four corners of the earth." The Sages devoted an entire blessing in the Amidah to this theme. We pray that we merit hearing the "great *shofar* of our freedom," so that God "gathers us together from the four corners of the earth to our Land."

As we watch the state of Israel gather Jews from around the world, we marvel at the fulfillment of Moses' promise—and our prayers—that the scattered exiles would one day be returned to their Land.

Founded upon the ashes of the Holocaust during which millions of Jews found themselves trapped without safe haven, the founders of the state of Israel imbued every Jew with the right to live in the Jewish state. During the first four months of independence some 300,000 newcomers, mainly Holocaust survivors, reached Israel's shores, and by the end of 1951, some 685,000 immigrants, half of them from Arab lands, had arrived, more than doubling Israel's Jewish population at the establishment of the state. An essential aspect of Israel's growth has been the immigration of Jews from dozens of countries on every continent speaking over 100 different languages. Recently, Israel happily closed another chapter in the *aliyah* story, as the Jewish Agency for Israel officially handed over the Jewish school in Gondar to the local mayor, [Israel Hayom](#) reported. This act marked the end of Operation Wings of a Dove, which brought the last 7,000 Ethiopian Jews to the Jewish State. At the ceremony, Jewish Agency Chairman Natan Sharansky—an immigrant from the former Soviet Union to Israel—said, "It is very symbolic that after their immigration to Israel, the Jews are leaving behind a school. We promise all the countries and communities everywhere, from which the Jews leave to immigrate [to Israel]—we will leave behind schools for children."

Moses' promise made thousands of years ago continues today as 7,000 Jews from Ethiopia immigrate to Israel to begin their life in the modern Jewish state. ■