

JANUARY 13, 2014

Parashat Yitro

Positive Pressure

And they stood at the foot of the mountain (Exodus 19:17)

וַיִּתְּצֵבוּ בְּתַהֲתִית הַהָר (שְׁמוֹת י"ז)

The Sages in the Talmud (Shabbat 88a), note that when translated literally, “and they stood at the foot of the mountain (19:17), means that the Children of Israel actually stood “under” Mount Sinai. Based on this reading, Rav Avdimi explains that the verse teaches us that “If you accept the Torah—good, but if not, here will be your grave.” Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (see Ein Ayah on Shabbat 88a) suggests that because the covenant was essential to the future of the Jewish nation, the Jews could not be allowed the possibility of refusal. Therefore, for their benefit, extreme pressure was exerted to ensure that they did indeed accept the Torah.

Because it was essential to the future of the Jewish nation, strong pressure was exerted to ensure that the Israelites accepted the Torah. Today, a group of Senators are working on legislation to exert strong pressure on Iran to abandon its dangerous nuclear program—an action that is essential to the future of the United States and its ally Israel.

Following the announcement of the six-month interim agreement with Iran, a group of U.S. Senators crafted the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act—a bill that would increase sanctions on Iran should the current talks fail. According to [Reuters](#), the bill, introduced by Robert Menendez (D-NJ), the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Mark Kirk (R-IL), requires further reductions in Iran’s oil exports and would apply new penalties on other industries if Iran either violates the interim agreement or fails to reach a final comprehensive deal. The bill would also provide guidance to the administration for the acceptable contours of a final agreement between Tehran and the P5+1, and provides the president with a six-month window for negotiations to achieve a final agreement and additional time-limited waivers in order to meet his request that no additional sanctions be imposed during the talks. Since the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act was introduced on Dec. 19, the number of co-sponsors has continued to grow. The United States must clearly signal to the Islamic regime that a mere willingness to talk is insufficient, and that Tehran cannot use negotiations as a delaying tactic. The Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act represents an important tool to increase the pressure on Iran to negotiate seriously during the six-month window if it wishes to avoid crippling economic sanctions. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The pressure exerted on the Jewish nation at Sinai represented a critical, positive step in our history. Pressure on Iran to negotiate represents the best chance to reach a similarly positive conclusion to the threat of a nuclear Iran. ■

A Deserved Recognition

And Jethro rejoiced (Exodus 17:9)

וַיִּחַד יִתְרוֹ (שְׁמוֹת י"ז)

This week’s parashah relates the story of the Revelation at Sinai, the critical founding national experience of the Jewish nation. Why was the parashah named after Jethro, who had served as the idolatrous high priest of Midian, while Moses himself never achieved a similar honor? Rabbi Ron Yosef suggests that Jethro’s great merit stems specifically from his past as the Priest of Midian. Precisely because he came from outside the Jewish nation and faith, his recognition of the greatness of the Exodus and the role of the Jewish people took on greater proportions.

Moreover, Jethro not only heard about the miraculous events; he took action, and came to visit Moses in the desert, offering words of advice, praise and encouragement.

Although from outside the Jewish nation, Jethro's name lives on due to his desire to take action to support the Jewish people. The state of Israel will soon honor a great American leader who followed directly in Jethro's footsteps.

Israel will name an Arrow defense missile facility after deceased former Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii for his contribution to Israel, marking the first time Israel has named a military facility after a non-Israeli. Inouye's solid support for the Jewish state throughout his decades-long career in Washington played a pivotal role in securing the strong friendship that binds the United States and Israel today. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), after Inouye, an honored World War II veteran who developed a dedication to Jews and Judaism after studying their history, had passed away in 2012, Israeli leaders decided to do something in his memory. "The Jews are a remarkable people," Inouye said. The senator "had a *mezuzah* on the doors of all five of his offices," as well as "something Israeli in each of them." Moreover, when Shimon Peres was prime minister in the mid-1980s Inouye told him, "We speak kind of Israel in Congress and loan to Israel at high interest rates, but give grants to others—that is not right," Inouye told Peres. "Mr. Prime Minister, I have studied the situation—there will be no more loans to Israel," he declared, implying that from then on, Israel would be receiving grants.

The Torah honored Jethro for his dedication to the Jewish nation by naming a parashah after him, Israel will pay tribute to Senator Daniel Inouye for his lifelong devotion, dedication and support for the Jewish state. ■

Controlling Hatred

You shall not covet (Exodus 20:14)

לא תחמוד (שמות כ:יד)

The last of the Ten Commandments is the prohibition against coveting the property of one's neighbor. Sefer Hachinuch (mitzvah 249) explains that one should not wonder how the Torah can command an individual to control one's emotions. He explains, "In truth, it is in the hand of every individual to control himself and his thoughts and his desires from everything that he wants, and it is within his ability and mindset to distance himself from, or draw closer to those yearnings according to his will. His heart is in his hands!"

The message of Sefer Hachinuch, that each of us has the ability to harness our desires and control our emotions, must be conveyed to the Palestinian Authority, which must reign in the overt hatred for Israel if it truly desires peace.

At a recent Israeli cabinet meeting, Israel Intelligence Minister Dr. Yuval Steinitz described the ongoing campaign of hatred and incitement against Israel and the Jewish people prevalent on official Palestinian media channels and promoted on Palestinian educational and religious networks. [The New York Times](#) offered a number of examples of incitement. "Adolf Hitler is quoted on the websites of Palestinian Authority schools. A young girl appears on Palestinian television, describing Jews as 'barbaric monkeys, wretched pigs' and the 'murderers of Muhammad,' the Islamic prophet. Maps on the Facebook page of the Palestinian presidential guards do not show Israel. President Mahmoud Abbas himself embraced as 'heroes' released Palestinian prisoners who killed Israelis." Steinitz noted that incitement activity is concentrated in communicating several main messages: Israel has no right to exist, certainly not as the state of the Jewish people, which, in any case, have no link to the holy Land; the disappearance of Israel is unavoidable and is expected soon; the Jews are sub-human creatures and must be dealt with accordingly; in principle, all forms of struggle, including terrorism, are legitimate in order to realize the final goal. Israeli officials have repeatedly complained about the ongoing incitement campaign. Appearing with Secretary of State John Kerry, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said, "This Palestinian government incitement is rampant... Instead of preparing Palestinians for peace, Palestinian leaders are teaching them to hate Israel." For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

The prohibition against coveting teaches us that we can and must control dangerous, destructive emotions. The Palestinian Authority must immediately embrace this lesson and reign in its campaign of hatred against Israel. ■

Sermon tidbits are intended for your use without attribution. Please feel free to use some or all of the material. Although it is not necessary, it is appreciated if copies of sermons or articles that use the ideas presented here are sent to synagogue@aipac.org.