

MAY 12, 2014

Parashat Bechukotai

The Blessing of Water

And I will give your rains in their season (Leviticus 26:4)

ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם (ויקרא כו:ד)

Nachmanides (on verse 4) notes that the blessing of timely rain did not just bring crops. Rather, the “rains in their season” implied a litany of additional blessings as well. “If [the rains] come in their proper season, the air is pure and good and rivers are good and this it is a cause of physical health...thus because the people do not become sick...and they live out the full extent of their days.” Divine blessings of rain would not just bring produce; they would also ensure the clean water critical for health and prosperity.

The rains of blessing brought not only bountiful crops, but also the clean water critical for health and well-being. Today, Israel stands at the forefront of international efforts to bring clean water to the world.

Israel has made a name for itself around the world for its water innovation and technology. Israeli companies are bringing critical know-how to cities across the globe, [including in the United States](#); helping communities deal with difficult drought conditions. Yet, hundreds of millions of people around the world still live without clean municipal water sources, suffering from water-borne diseases that cause millions of deaths. According to [CNN](#), an Israeli company thinks it can play a part in alleviating this crisis by producing drinking water from thin air. Water-Gen has developed an energy-efficient Atmospheric Water-Generation Unit which produces between 65-210 gallons of potable water a day (depending on temperature and humidity conditions) using two cents worth of electricity to produce a liter of water. Water-Gen has also developed a battery-operated portable water purification system called “Spring”, which fits into a backpack and can filter 48 gallons of water. In 2013, the IDF took Spring to the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan devastated the island country and left 4.2 million people affected by water scarcity; filtering what was undrinkable water into clean, potable water.

Rain brings not only the blessing of produce, but of clean water critical for health. An Israeli company is creating products that can bring clean, potable water – and the associated health benefits – to millions around the world. ■

Strength from Unity

And I shall give peace in the land (Leviticus 26:6)

ונתתי שלום בארץ (ויקרא כו:ו)

Rabbi Simcha Raz notes that the blessings seem to be out of order. We are first blessed with, “Peace in the land” (verse 6), and only subsequently are we blessed that “You shall chase your enemies...” (verse 7). Shouldn’t the blessings be reversed? Rabbi Raz (See *Shivim Panim L’Torah* vol. 3 p. 250) explains that “peace in the land” refers not to external threats, but to internal peace between brothers. This reminds us “that strife should not emanate between brothers. Only when brothers and compatriots work together [will], ‘Your enemies will fall before you...’” Partnership and unity create the camaraderie critical to fend off those who wish to do us harm.

When we have harmony and unity with our brothers, our combined strength helps combat those who wish to attack us. The unity between America and Israel has strengthened both nations, helping them preserve “peace in the land.”

Israel and the United States face similar threats, including: terrorism, the spread of radical Islamist ideology, nuclear and missile proliferation, as well as narcotics, counterfeiting and cyber warfare. In order to assist the Jewish State, as well as strengthen American efforts, the United States enjoys a high level of strategic cooperation with Israel.

American-Israeli cooperation begins with frequent high-level strategic dialogues among senior political and military leaders and extends to combined military planning and exercises, intelligence-sharing and technological development. This network of American and Israeli military and intelligence coordination provides a powerful deterrent to those in the Middle East who seek to harm either country, and serves as the most stabilizing feature in an otherwise unstable region of the world. President Obama, emphasizing the importance of this relationship, has said, “Many of the same forces that threaten Israel also threaten the United States and our efforts to secure peace and stability in the Middle East. Our alliance with Israel serves our national interests.” Israel remains America’s most reliable strategic partner and democratic ally in the Middle East, working to defeat common threats and supporting America’s regional and global policy objectives.

As the Torah reminds us, when we have peace and harmony with our brothers, that partnership brings the critical strength necessary to guarantee “peace in the land.” ■

The Process of Punishment

And if you do not listen to me (Leviticus 26:14)

ואם לא תשמעו לי (ויקרא כו:יד)

The *tochecha* (rebuke) which comprises the bulk of Bechukotai, chronicles the string of increasingly harsh punishments that would befall the nation of Israel should it abandon the strictures of the Torah. The Midrash (Midrash Tadshe) notes that these punishments were not immediate, as the text describes a process of increased pressure that would develop over a period of time. “When the Holy One judges humanity, [mankind] is first afflicted with the light [punishment] and later with the harsh [punishment].” Punishment was not immediate, but instead delayed in order to give the sinner time to reflect, repent and change. Yet, when the lighter punishment proved insufficient, the grace period became counterproductive, as the reprieve from punishment allowed the sinner the opportunity to continue to sin unimpeded.

Because the process of compassionate punishment takes time, the international community must ensure that any agreement with Iran precludes the possibility of quickly enriching the uranium it needs to build a nuclear weapon.

Today, Iran could produce enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon (known as its “breakout time”) in about two months. If it employed the additional centrifuges that it has installed but is not currently operating, Iran could shorten that time frame significantly. As the international community contemplates acceptable terms for a comprehensive agreement, some have suggested that 6-12 months would be a reasonable “breakout time.” Yet, Iran’s history, and the nature of compassionate punishment, clearly indicates that such a short breakout time would not prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

Imposing sanctions takes time. The international community worked slowly and deliberately, hoping that a program of compassionate punishment would convince Iran to abandon its nuclear work. It took years, and successive rounds of increasingly biting economic sanctions to coerce Iran to agree to negotiations. Given Iran’s long track record of lying and concealing its nuclear program, should it choose to resume its enrichment, a limited breakout timeframe would leave insufficient time to implement stringent new sanctions, forcing the international community to choose between accommodation and the use of force.

The process of punishment described in the *tochecha* gave a sinful nation time and opportunity to reflect and repent. Yet, it could also give Iran the “breakout” time it needs to build a nuclear weapon. Only the dismantlement of Iran’s centrifuge capacity can truly ensure that Iran lacks a uranium path to nuclear weapons. ■

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