



Sermon Tidbits

MAY 26, 2014

Parashat Naso - Shavuot

Proactive Leaders

The princes of Israel offered... (Numbers 7:2)

ויקריבו נשיאי ישראל (במדבר ז:ב)

Parashat Naso concludes with an extensive description of the twelve identical offerings brought by the princes of each tribe. Rashi (on verse 3) wonders what motivated the princes to jump to give offerings first at the consecration when they hadn't rushed to contribute for the Tabernacle's construction. He explains that during the collection for the construction of the Tabernacle, the princes opted to wait, committing to compensate for any shortfall in donations. Yet, when they saw that the people had donated everything necessary they said, "What is there left for us to do?" For this reason, in order to ensure a meaningful role in the consecration, they insisted on offering their donation first.

The Princes recognized the need to be proactive and not wait until being called on to act. Having come to the same conclusion, the U.S. House of Representatives has made efforts to be actively involved in America's negotiations with Iran and in providing for Israel's defense.

Last week the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed (325-98) the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The bill authorizes over \$600 million in support for rocket defense systems for Israel including Iron Dome, Arrow 3 and David's Sling. In addition, the House legislation includes language that it is, "the policy of the United States to take all necessary steps to ensure that Israel possesses and maintains an independent capability to remove existential threats to its security and defend its vital national interests." The Act further states, "Congress declares that it is the policy of the United States to fully support Israel's lawful exercise of self-defense, including actions to halt regional aggression."

Just as importantly, the House took the proactive step of reinforcing three key elements of American policy on Iran: tough diplomacy to dismantle Iran's nuclear weapons infrastructure, strong sanctions enforcement, and a credible military option. The legislation stresses that any agreement with Iran must prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons capability. NDAA further includes language requiring the Obama administration to report on the status of Iran's nuclear program and its compliance with the interim nuclear agreement.

The princes took the initiative to ensure their role in the consecration of the Tabernacle. We applaud the U.S. House for doing the same, by acting now to ensure that our elected legislators play a meaningful role in the outcome of the negotiations with Iran and in Israel's right to defend herself. ■

A Joint Effort

And they brought their offering (Numbers 7:3)

ויביאו את קרבנם (במדבר ז:ג)

Why does the Torah first list the exact measure of the offering of each prince, and then also describe the total amount of their offerings together at the end of the chapter? Ramban (on verse 3) answers that because they worked together, God wished to honor each prince individually, but also emphasize that each prince was equally important. "All the princes brought this offering on the same day because they all agreed to it simultaneously...He wanted to mention

them all by name and the details of their offerings...Afterwards, He included them all again in a general verse in order to tell us that they were all equal before Him.”

The princes were honored both for their individual contributions and also for their unity in their gift to the Tabernacle. Recently, the United States and Israel conducted a critical drill that highlighted the unity between the two nations.

Each year, various branches and levels of the Israeli and American militaries hold numerous joint training exercises in both the United States and Israel. They learn from one another, improve how they work together and train for combat situations in diverse geographical locations. A centerpiece of the interaction between the two militaries has been combined missile defense training, including the biannual Juniper Cobra exercise. In this maneuver, U.S. and Israeli forces practice cooperative tactics to counter the growing threat from ballistic missiles and long-range rockets. This month, over a thousand American troops arrived in Israel for the Juniper Cobra exercise, the [Times of Israel](#) reported. The five-day drill—first held in 2001—measures military responses to missile attacks. Visiting Israel to kick off the exercise, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel noted that the exercise employed Israel’s entire rocket and ballistic missile architecture, including Iron Dome, Arrow and David’s Sling, assets that the United States is proud to have helped Israel finance and develop. “Nothing speaks more clearly than America’s concrete support for Israel’s defense,” Hagel said. “That includes \$3.1 billion per year in foreign military financing, which is not only more than we provide to any other nation, but the most we have provided to any nation in American history.”

Just as the princes were praised for working together, Israel and the United States’ joint military efforts have significantly aided Israel in its efforts to repel the numerous security challenges threatening the Jewish State. ■

A People of Kindness – Shavuot

You have shown more kindness in the end... (Ruth 3:10)

היטבת חסדך האחרון... (רות ג:י)

The Book of Ruth, which we read on Shavuot, highlights the righteousness of Ruth and the kindness she performs on behalf of Naomi. When Ruth wonders why Boaz allows her to collect grain exclusively in his field, he explains that, “It has fully been told to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband...” (2:11) The Sages describe Ruth’s attribute of kindness (*chessed*) as a defining character of the Jewish people, noting in the Talmud, (Yevamot 79a) “There are three characteristics which distinguish the Jewish People — they are merciful, they are bashful and they are performers of acts of kindness.”

The people of Israel have integrated Ruth’s attribute of *chessed* into our national ethos. Today, the state of Israel continues to promote this attribute of *chessed*, offering aid and assistance to people in need around the world.

Following devastating and unprecedented flooding in Bosnia and Serbia, Israel dispatched emergency aid and basic equipment to the flood victims, “including medicine, food, blankets and rain gear” the [Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The embassy also airlifted essential medicine to the hospital in the city of Bijeljina in Bosnia’s Republic of Serbia, a region where roads were cut off due to heavy rainfall. Aleksander Nikolic, the assistant chief representative of the Republic of Serbia in Israel, said the Israeli aid was a “very human gesture” and “proof of friendship in a most difficult moment.” In addition, according to the [Times of Israel](#), “Israel has sent two anti-terror experts to Nigeria to join the search for hundreds of schoolgirls kidnapped by extremist Islamist group Boko Haram.” Israel sent the experts after Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu called Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan with an offer to help search for the more than 200 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram. “President Jonathan welcomed the offer by Mr. Netanyahu to send a team of Israeli counter-terrorism experts to assist in the ongoing search and rescue operations,” the Nigerian leader’s office said.

Like Ruth, who was recognized for her acts of kindness, the State of Israel expends great effort and energy to help others in need across the globe. ■

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