

JUNE 23, 2014

Parashat Chukat

Separation from Impurity

A red heifer (Numbers 19:2)

פרה אדמה (במדבר יט:ב)

The ashes of the Red Heifer represented the only way to achieve purity from ritual defilement. For this reason, the priests took special precautions during the production process to ensure the ritual purity of the ashes. This included purifying the priests for seven days before the burning of the heifer and the designation of children to draw the water for the mixture who were, from birth, kept exclusively in areas known to be ritually pure. Maimonides writes, “Extra stringencies were employed with regard to the purity observed in preparation for offering the red heifer and great extremes were taken to keep a distance from ritual impurity...” (Laws of the Red Heifer 2:1) The priests took these severe steps because any association with impurity would forever defile the ashes, rendering them useless.

Any association with impurity defiles anything associated with that impurity. By associating with Hamas, the Palestinian Authority has not only legitimized a terrorist organization, but defiled itself in the process.

Earlier this month, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas implemented an agreement to form a unity government backed by Hamas. Abbas’ decision to align with a radical Islamist organization committed to Israel’s destruction is an unfortunate setback to the peace process. Hamas, a Gaza-based terror group backed by Iran, is fundamentally opposed to demands mandated by the Quartet (U.S., E.U., Russia and the U.N.) to recognize Israel, renounce violence and adhere to past agreements. Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh reiterated Hamas’ continued commitment to destroying Israel through violence. “We think that the path of negotiations and peace talks has reached a dead end, and that the resistance which liberated Gaza and defended Gaza can liberate the West Bank and the rest of the Palestinian lands,” he told Al-Aqsa TV, the Hamas-run television network.

American congressional leadership on both sides of the aisle strongly condemned the unity government, voicing significant qualms about Hamas’ role and calling for an immediate review of U.S. funding. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) called the move “a gigantic step backward.” “I stand with Israel and condemn the Palestinians’ decision to form this new government,” he said. “I will be joining Democrats and Republicans in efforts to suspend all aid to the Palestinian Authority as long as they continue this unity government or until Hamas recognizes the state of Israel and rejects terrorism,” added Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) the ranking member on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs.

Any association with ritual impurity would have defiled the precious ashes of the Red Heifer. By associating with Hamas, the PA has defiled itself and derailed the possibility of peace with Israel. ■

Economic Encouragement

Neither will we drink of the water of the wells (Numbers 20:17)

ולא נשתה מי באר (במדבר כ:יז)

In his appeal to the nation of Edom for permission to traverse their territory peacefully, Moses notes that not only would the nation take care not to damage Edomite property, but it would also “not drink the water of the wells.” Rashi (on verse 17) points out that when translated literally, Moses promises not to drink from a single well. Which well is

that? Rashi explains that Moses promises that the Jews wouldn't drink even from their own well. "Rather, [he says that] we will purchase from you food and drink for your benefit. From this we derive that a guest [at an inn] even though he has food to eat should purchase [food] from the innkeeper in order to benefit his host."

Moses recognized that good relationships must bring economic benefits to all parties. Today, the United States and Israel work together to bolster an already strong economic relationship that benefits citizens of both countries.

Since 1985, when the United States and Israel signed America's first free trade agreement, trade between the two allies has since grown by 500 percent, and more than \$78 million worth of goods and services are exchanged each day. U.S. and Israeli businesses, researchers and academics continue to find new opportunities for investment and collaboration. Last week, U.S. Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, met with Israel's Finance Minister Yair Lapid to discuss ways to advance economic ties between the two countries, the [Jerusalem Post](#) reported. Critically, the economic benefits flow in two directions. Between 2000 and 2009, Israeli companies invested more than \$50 billion in the United States placing Israel among the top 20 suppliers of direct investment into the United States. Last year alone, Israeli companies invested almost \$10 billion in the United States, nearly identical to the level of U.S. investment into Israel. When looked at in terms of the relative scales of the two economies, we see with absolute clarity the benefit of the relationship to *both* countries. Individual states have also increased their economic involvement with Israel. [The Times of Israel](#) reports that Michigan governor Rick Snyder recently signed an agreement with Israel's Midwest Consul General Roey Gilad to jointly support industrial research and development projects.

Moses recognized that a meaningful agreement with Edom would have to bring tangible economic benefit. Today, economic ties between the U.S. and Israel help the Jewish State and bring true benefit to America's economy. ■

Self Defense

And took some of them captive (Numbers 21:1)

וישב ממנו שבי (במדבר כא:א)

While Rashi suggests that the Canaanites took only a single maidservant captive, Ramban (on verse 1) explains that according to the simple interpretation, while the Canaanites did not kill anyone in their attack they captured "a small number" of prisoners. Rabbi Shlomo Aviner notes that just as Abram, when confronted with the capture of Lot, responded with a military action aimed at freeing his nephew (see Genesis 14), Moses also responds to the aggressive act of kidnapping civilians with military action aimed at returning the captured citizens.

Just as Moses and the Children of Israel justifiably responded to protect the nation from the horrors of kidnapping, Israel has both the right and the obligation to take action to bring about the return of its three kidnapped teenagers.

Late last week, following the kidnapping of three teenagers who were traveling home from school, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry [condemned](#) the kidnapping as a "despicable terrorist act," offered America's full support for Israel in its search for the missing teens and encouraged full cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian security services. In a positive development, the Palestinian Authority security forces have been cooperating with Israeli security forces in the search. Israel, which has implicated Hamas in the kidnapping, took military action aimed at bringing about the immediate return of the teens, as well weakening Hamas' infrastructure in the West Bank. Commenting on Israel's response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, speaking at the 29th International Mayors Conference, [said that](#), "We are in the midst of a wide-ranging operation. It will yet include many actions against the terrorists that attack, murder and kidnap Israeli citizens and want to destroy the State of Israel." The kidnapping serves as a stark reminder of the dangers Israelis and Americans in Israel are forced to confront on a daily basis. We must strongly support our ally Israel's right to defend its citizens and applaud the many members of Congress, on both sides of the aisle, who have spoken-out against this terror attack and in support of the Jewish state.

Moses recognized the need to respond to the kidnapping of Jews with military action. In addition to praying for their well-being, we must uphold Israel's right to take to action to defend its citizens.

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.