



Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 18, 2014

Parashat Re'eh

A Stark Choice

A blessing and a curse (Deuteronomy 11:26)

ברכה וקללה (דברים יא:כו)

Moses tells the nation that he places before them “a blessing” should they choose the path of a righteous life, and “a curse” should they choose a life of sin and evil. S’forno (on verse 26) notes that Moses leaves no room for a middle ground. “See that you do not conduct your affairs in the middle (ambivalent) way, as is the way of the majority of people, for I place before you a blessing and a curse, which are two extremes...both stand before you to achieve, according to which you choose.” When choosing between good and evil, compromise is not an option.

Just as we cannot compromise when choosing between good and evil, the world must not compromise when choosing between states that represent stability, freedom and individual rights, and those that promote radicalism, terror and murder.

In a recent interview in [the Atlantic](#), former secretary of state Hillary Clinton highlighted the danger that radical Islam represents to the United States. “One of the reasons why I worry about what’s happening in the Middle East right now is because of the breakout capacity of jihadist groups that can affect Europe, can affect the United States...Jihadist groups are governing territory. They will never stay there, though. They are driven to expand. Their *raison d’être* is to be against the West, against the Crusaders, against the fill-in-the-blank—and we all fit into one of these categories.” Speaking to [Fox News](#), Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu shared a similar message saying that, “the threat from Islamic militants is real, and will spread to other countries if the terrorists are not stopped. This is a danger I’ve been pointing to, it’s not a spin, it’s not a whim, it is a clinical diagnosis of a pathological movement that is sweeping our area but will soon come to a theater near you and it has to be stopped now.” [CNN](#) reported that moderate Arab states have also silently sided with Israel in its recent conflict with Hamas. Danielle Pletka, vice president of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute said that, “It’s no longer the Muslims against the Jews. Now it’s the extremists—the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Hezbollah, and their backers Iran, Qatar and Turkey—against Israel and the more moderate Muslims including Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.”

Like the stark choice between good and evil which Moses presented to the people, the world must face the choice between moderate stable governments and the chaos radical Islamic regimes hope to spread around the world. ■

Hiding the Truth

If he should entice you...secretly (Deuteronomy 13:7)

כי יסיתך...בסתר (דברים יג:ז)

Moses warns the Jewish nation against the possibility of a sinner attempting to entice fellow Jews to worship idolatry. Specifically, Moses notes that this enticement would take place “secretly.” The Midrash (Midrash Tanaim Devarim 13:7) explains that falsehood is spread in secret, while truth stands the test of public scrutiny. “The verse teaches us that [those who entice to sin] only speak in private—‘in the blackness of night and the darkness’ (Proverbs 7:9)—while the words of Torah are taught in public.” While people who speak truthfully do so proudly, in public, those with a sinful agenda hide the truth and only speak in secret.

Adhering to the principle of the Midrash that those who seek to entice others to sin do so in secret, Hamas utilized tactics of intimidation and harassment in order to hide its sinful, destructive behavior from the world.

Throughout the month-long conflict between Israel and Hamas, the images presented in the media consistently presented a one-sided narrative. While media outlets shared a plethora of images featuring the Israeli military's strength and action, pictures from Gaza portrayed civilian suffering and destruction, but never images of the firing of rockets, armed fighters, or the use of civilians as human shields. This is because, according to the [Jerusalem Post](#), Hamas used “threats and pressure to prevent journalists from providing objective reports.” In response to Hamas’ tactics, the [Foreign Press Association](#) issued a statement protesting, “in the strongest terms the blatant, incessant, forceful and unorthodox methods employed by the Hamas authorities and their representatives against visiting international journalists in Gaza over the past month.” These tactics resulted in numerous examples of stories, reports and photo essays portraying the Israeli military which [left Hamas entirely out of the picture](#). This one-sided, false portrayal of the conflict depicted Israel as a vicious aggressor, rather than a nation forced to respond to a terrorist enemy that fired thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians.

Moses noted that those who wish to entice to sin do so in secret, hoping to hide the truth from the light of day. By capitulating to Hamas’ terrorist tactics, the international press became the terrorists’ tool to spread their hateful lies. ■

A Proper Accounting

You shall bring forth all the tithes (Deuteronomy 14:28)

תוציא את כל מעשר (דברים יד:כח)

During the fourth and seventh years of the *Shemittah* cycle, Jews are required to remove [from their homes] the tithes—one tenth of annual produce or earnings—that had accumulated from the previous three years and give them to either the Levite, the poor, or to be consumed in Jerusalem. This procedure, which the Sages called *biur ma'asrot*—“the disposal of the tithes”—requires an accounting to ensure that we have accrued no improper benefits from tithes that we have no right to keep (See Deuteronomy 26:12-15).

The disposal of tithes reminds us of the need to take a periodic accounting to prevent improper benefits. The United States must do a similar accounting to ensure that Iran cannot skirt the effects of biting economic sanctions.

When the P5+1 nations agreed to a four-month extension of talks with Iran over its nuclear weapons program, they also agreed to give Iran access to an [additional \\$2.8 billion in oil export revenues](#), which were previously frozen abroad by American sanctions. Yet, despite this significant concession, recent reports indicate that Iran has utilized loopholes to skirt sanctions and bolster its economy. According to the [New York Times](#), “Iran is finding a way around Western sanctions to export increasing amounts of an ultralight oil to China and other Asian markets... According to Iranian customs data, the country in recent months has exported 525,000 barrels a day of the ultralight oil, known as condensates... [which have] generated as much as \$1.5 billion in extra trade—a rate of about \$6 billion a year.” Because these condensates aren’t technically considered oil, Iran has increased its petroleum shipments to Asian markets without violating the letter of the sanctions, averaging 1.4 million barrels a day between January and May, far more than the one-million-barrels-a-day limit American officials aimed for.

While the U.S. warned Iran that the extension represented a “last chance” to reach an agreement and to cut its nuclear program, only the sting of economic sanctions coerced Iran to originally enter into negotiations. Yet, [according to the IMF](#), “the easing of international sanctions have helped to steady Iran’s economy and cut inflation.” Combined with a [recently signed \\$20 billion oil deal with Russia](#), Iran’s efforts to skirt sanctions could weaken the sanctions to the point that they are no longer effective. The United States must redouble its enforcement efforts and ensure that Iran cannot sidestep the sanctions that represent the only hope to peacefully end its nuclear weapons threat.

The Torah requires an accounting to ensure Jews do not improperly benefit from tithes. Iran must be held to a similar accounting to ensure that it cannot avoid the biting sting of economic sanctions and produce a nuclear weapon. ■

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