



Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 25, 2014

Parashat Shoftim

Critical Backing for Demilitarization

Judges and officers (Deuteronomy 16:18)

שפטים ושטרנים (דברים טז:יח)

While we can readily appreciate the role of the judges—to adjudicate legal matters “with righteous judgment” (verse 18)—who are the “officers” and what was their role? Rashi (on verse 18) explains that the officers were police enforcers “who govern the people after the command [of the judges] who strike and bind with a rod of with a lash”, but Malbim (ibid) suggests that the officers are “the ruling nobles...who give the officers the power to coerce the defendant to adhere to the [judges’] rulings.” Only with the backing of powerful political forces would the judges’ words carry weight among the people.

Just as the judges required political backing to enforce their rulings, Israel needs the solid backing of the international community in order to actualize its demand to demilitarize Gaza and bring stability to the region.

Even before Hamas renewed its rocket fire on Israeli cities following nine days of quiet, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu emphasized that the best chance for peace in Israel’s southern region required the demilitarization of Gaza. Speaking to several Sunday news programs in the U.S., Netanyahu said, “How do you know that that concrete and cement [sent to rebuild Gaza] will not be used again as Hamas has been using in the last few years to rebuild the terror tunnel, the terror kingdom underground that they’re using to penetrate Israel? You have to have a mechanism to ensure demilitarization. You have to have supervision on the social and economic relief.” Israeli Intelligence Minister Yuval Steinitz echoed the sentiment telling Israeli Army Radio that “a seaport without demilitarization would essentially mean ‘duty-free rockets’ for Hamas.” In fact, the 28 foreign ministers of EU member states issued a statement condemning the rocket fire from Gaza and calling for the disarmament of Hamas and other militant groups in the Gaza Strip.

Disarming Hamas and other terrorist groups would be a critical step to ensure security for Israel and allow Gazan economic development. As both Secretary of State John Kerry and National Security Adviser Susan Rice have said, “Any process to resolve the crisis in Gaza in a lasting and meaningful way must lead to the disarmament of Hamas and all terrorist groups.” In order to ensure lasting peace and stability Israel needs the firm backing of United States and the international community for the demilitarization of Hamas.

Judges needed the backing of powerful political forces to enforce their decisions. Today, the U.S. must back Israel by enforcing its demand that Hamas disarm and bring stability both to Israel and the citizens of Gaza. ■

Waste Not, and Want Not...for a Cold Drink

You shall not destroy (Deuteronomy 20:19)

לא תשחית (דברים כ:יט)

While the Torah prohibits the cutting of fruit trees in the context of laying siege to a city, Rambam (Laws of Kings Chapter 6) greatly expands this prohibition to include many other types of unnecessary waste: “This prohibition does not apply to trees alone. Rather, anyone who breaks utensils, tears garments, destroys buildings, stops up a spring, or ruins food with a destructive intent transgresses the command ‘Do not destroy.’” The Sefer Hachinuch (529) adds that

righteous people “do not destroy even a mustard seed in the world, and any wanton loss or destruction that they see causes them anguish. And if they can save—they will save anything from being wasted with all their ability.”

The mitzvah of *Bal Tashchit* obligates us to prevent unnecessary waste. In this vein, an Israeli startup has developed a system that could ultimately save millions of plastic water bottles.

After tiring of spending money on new water bottles that he would discard after a single use, Itay Tayas Zamir, CEO of Woosh Water Systems, developed a system intended for highly populated cities that rinses and cleans your water bottle and offers a clean, cold refill within a minute. “It’s our aim to give people the option to refill their own bottle and not to buy more plastic bottles when they are out on the street. We are focusing on the public and not the private space. Every plastic bottle you save, you help the environment in the sense of reducing the carbon footprint of the city, of the community you live in, and reducing the carbon footprint individually,” Tayas Zamir says. The system cleans your bottle every time it’s used with the help of a non-polluting ozone purification technology to ensure no waste or chemicals are going down the drain. While seven machines have been installed in Tel Aviv to test the system, the company hopes to expand and install water refilling stations in cities around the world.

The prohibition against unnecessary waste encourages us to find creative new ways to use the world’s resources with care and sensitivity. Thanks to a creative Israeli idea, we may be discarding fewer plastic bottles in the near future. ■

A Message of Leadership

And all the elders of that city (Deuteronomy 21:6)

וכל זקני העיר (דברים כא:ו)

During the ritual of the *eglah arufah*, performed upon the discovery of an unidentified victim of murder, the elders of the closest city must “wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley...and say: ‘Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it.’” (verses 6-7) According to the Midrash (Midrash Tanaim Devarim 21), while the elders themselves are not suspected of murder, they are nonetheless charged with vocally repudiating violence and creating an environment that rejects killing. Says the Midrash, “It is obvious that the elders of the court are not murderers! What is the meaning of ‘our hands have not shed this blood’? That their hands were not cut off [from taking action to prevent murder]...”

The elders of a city must repudiate violence and forcefully reject murder. Recently, members of the Senate did just that, offering a reward for information regarding the murder of an American citizen by Hamas terrorists.

By unanimous consent, the Senate passed a bill offering up to \$5 million for any information on the murder of Naftali Fraenkel, a dual U.S.-Israel citizen and one of three teenagers kidnapped and killed by Hamas operatives in the West Bank in June. The legislation (S. 2577) was authored by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) and cosponsored by Sens. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Marco Rubio (R-FL). Its passage occurred within days of a top Hamas official publically declaring members of his militant group kidnapped three Israeli teenagers and the arrest of the Hamas mastermind behind the kidnapping, [Husam Qawasmeh](#). The Senate's bipartisan effort to seek justice for the murdered teen demonstrates America's commitment to combat terror that organizations like Hamas proudly broadcast to the world.

Like the elders of the court, whose proclamations of innocence repudiated the abhorrent act of murder, the Senate’s action to punish perpetrators of terrorism similarly proclaims America’s rejection of violence and murder. ■

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