



Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 3, 2015

Parashat Eikev

A Bad Test

To test you (Deuteronomy 8:2)

לנסותך (דברים ח:ב)

As long as there have been tests, people have been searching for ways to cheat and circumvent them. How do you reliably test someone who has proven him or herself to be untrustworthy? We find in Parashat Eikev one possible answer: give a much more extensive test. Describing the forty-year long journey through the desert, Moses refers to the ordeal specifically as a “test.” He tells the nation that, “You shall remember all the ways which Adonai your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness that God might afflict you, *to test you*, to know what was in your heart...” (Deuteronomy 8:2) What aspect of the wandering specifically represented a test? Moses explains that God, “...fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers knew not, that He might afflict you, *and that God might test you...*” (verse 16) The Manna served as a forty-year long test of the nation’s faith in God. Why did the test need to last such a long time—for the entire forty year period?

We can find an answer in the nation’s initial response to the original test. When the Jewish nation, fresh from the salvation at the Sea of Reeds, found itself without food, God provided the Manna to sustain the nation, with two stipulations: First, take only what you need and no more; second, take twice your allotted ration on Friday in preparation for the Sabbath, as gathering is prohibited on the Day of Rest. In each case, the people failed the test. God later complains bitterly to Moses about the nation’s failures, telling him that the people, “have tested Me these ten times, and have not listened to My voice.” (Numbers 14:22) Rabbi Ovadia Batenura (on Avot 5:4) explains that they failed “twice with regard to the Manna: [they were told] ‘do not go out’ and they went out, [and they were told], ‘Let no man leave over [until morning]’ and they left over.” The people failed the original test of the Manna. How then could they prove themselves worthy of God’s trust? Only an exhaustive test—one that lasted many years—could demonstrate that they had changed and learned the lessons inherent in the test of the Manna.

For this reason, we are left wondering why the United States and our P5+1 partners entered into an agreement that may fail to prevent Iran, a known cheater, from once again cheating on its agreements with the world. Government officials agree that an essential key to the agreement with Iran is the process of verification: we must be absolutely certain that Iran is adhering to its obligations. It is for this reason that Congress demanded “anytime, anywhere” inspections as part of the accord. Yet, rather than “anytime, anywhere,” the P5+1 agreed to give Iran up to twenty-four days before Iran must grant access to suspected nuclear sites. Experts have expressed grave concerns about the twenty four day period. According to the [New York Times](#), “several experts, including a former high-ranking official at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said a provision that gives Iran up to 24 days to grant access to inspectors might enable it to escape detection.” Olli Heinonen, a former deputy director of the IAEA said that, “A 24-day adjudicated timeline reduces detection probabilities exactly where the system is weakest: detecting undeclared facilities and materials.” It’s easy to inspect locations we know about. But twenty four days is far too long to inspect locations that are not confirmed nuclear sites. David Albright, a former weapons inspector in Iraq, said that three weeks is ample time for the Iranians to dispose of any evidence of prohibited nuclear weapons work. Among the possibilities, he said, were experiments with high explosives that could be used to trigger a nuclear weapon, or the construction of a small plant to make centrifuges. “If it is on a small scale, they may be able to clear it out in 24 days,” Albright said [to The New York Times] in a telephone interview. “They are practiced at cheating. You can’t count on them to make a mistake.”

Even more disturbing is the recent revelation that no less than Iran itself would be conducting the collection of soil samples, a critical aspect of testing for nuclear activity. According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), “Senators complained... that Iran would be allowed to manage some of the IAEA’s investigation. They said they were told Tehran would conduct its own soil sampling at a military site called Parchin, where, allegedly, explosive devices were tested. ‘We’re going to trust Iran to do their own testing? This is absolutely ludicrous,’ Sen. James Risch (R -ID) told Obama administration officials at a congressional hearing last week. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) said: ‘Chain of custody means nothing if, at the very beginning, what you’re given is chosen and derived by the perpetrator. If that is true, it would be the equivalent of the fox guarding the chicken coop.’”

Iran has clearly demonstrated over time that the world cannot trust it to test itself. Under the current agreement, Iran has been given ample opportunity to cheat and continue to covertly develop its nuclear weapons program while benefitting from immediate cessation of all economic sanctions. This agreement, rather than preventing a nuclear Iran, practically encourages it. Our elected representatives have the power to vote “no” to stop this bad deal and insist that the United States return to the bargaining table. We can then negotiate an agreement that ensures Iran cannot develop a nuclear weapons capability. ■

A Land of Water Resources

A land of brooks of water (Deuteronomy 8:7)

ארץ נחלי מים (דברים ח:ז)

Twice in this parashah Moses extolls the Land of Israel for its water resources. He first describes the land as, “a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing forth in valleys and hills...” (8:7) Later he describes the land as a place whose inhabitants, “drink water as the rain of heaven comes down...” (11:11) The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 48:10) notes that this blessing of water would be in the merit of Abraham’s willingness to share his water with his guests. “Said Rabbi Eliezer in the name of Rabbi Simai, [God said to Abraham]: You said, ‘Please take a bit of water.’ (Genesis 18:4) I swear that I will repay your descendants in the desert, in the Land, and in the future... Where is it written [that they will be blessed with water in the future]? As it is written, ‘And it shall come to pass in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem.’” (Zechariah 14:8)

Today, Israel enjoys the blessings of abundant water—and shares that blessing with others. Israel spreads crucial technology and water capabilities with drought-stricken locales around the world. Nowhere is the need for Israeli water tech more pressing than in California, which is suffering from one of the worst droughts in recorded history. To address this pressing problem, officials and business leaders from California and Israel are working together to bring Israeli know-how to solve American water problems.

Last month, the Milken Innovation Center at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS) hosted a conference for senior Israeli and Californian officials seeking to solve California’s water crisis, reports [The Jerusalem Post](#). [In addition](#), “a delegation of water companies headed to California...in order to promote solutions to the severe drought that the coastal state has been facing.” The delegation met with companies including Costco, Coca Cola and Anheuser-Busch, water corporations in Los Angeles and San Francisco and officials in California’s Department of Water. Officials from both regions expressed hope that by bringing Israeli technology in desalination, drip irrigation, computerized water management, waste water treatment, and other water related areas, California would be able to follow Israel’s lead and avoid catastrophic conditions that would adversely affect millions of Americans.

Moses promised the blessings of water to the Land of Israel both in his era, and in the future. Today, Israel is sharing that blessing around the world, bringing badly needed solutions to parched regions around the world. ■

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