

JULY 6, 2015

## Parashat Pinchas

### Balancing Power and Peace

My covenant of peace (Numbers 25:12)

את בריתי שלום (במדבר כה:יב)

Why was Pinchas, who committed a violent, zealous act, given a “blessing of peace”? Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Sofer explains (see Parparaot L’Torah vol. 4, p. 202) that zealotry is an “extreme attribute which carries with it great danger” which must be used only in unusual circumstances. Great people recognize when and where to utilize zealotry—and when not to. Because Pinchas was the first biblical figure to commit a zealous act, he was also given the attribute of peace to counter-balance his actions. This, Rabbi Sofer writes, “serves as a lesson for the future, that in private and public life, the ways of peace are preferable to acts of vigilance.”

Israel has consistently recognized the power of violence and the need to balance that power with peace. It is precisely for this reason that Israel exhibits a greater degree of restraint than any army in the world. During last summer’s war in Gaza, Israel scrupulously employed extraordinary measures exceeding international legal standards in order to avoid civilian casualties. During the conflict, Israel risked the lives of its own soldiers to spare civilian lives by providing Gaza residents with advance warning of impending attacks. Moreover, throughout the conflict, Israel repeatedly sought to end the hostilities through ceasefires which were met by Hamas rocket launchings.

Despite Israel’s extraordinary efforts, the United Nations Human Rights Council [issued a draft resolution condemning Israel](#) for its actions, and made no mention in its draft resolution of the Hamas rockets fired at Israeli civilians which precipitated the conflict. On [Friday, July 3](#), the United States was the only country to support Israel and to oppose this outrageous resolution to hold the Jewish state accountable for possible war crimes. “We are troubled that this current resolution focuses exclusively on alleged Israeli violations, without any expressed reference to Palestinian violations,” U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. in Geneva Keith Harper said as he explained why his country voted against the resolution. The historic alliance between the United States and Israel is the most stabilizing feature in an otherwise unstable region of the world.

For its great efforts to protect Gazan citizens and to return peace to the region, Israel deserves praise rather than criticism. One sided efforts which fail to recognize Israel’s restraint and its desire for peace will not further the interests of the Palestinian people. Instead, they will only encourage Hamas to again attack Israel, forcing its citizens to suffer the consequences. ■

### Premeditated Terror

By their wiles (Numbers 25:18)

בנכליהם (במדבר כה:יח)

Each of us enjoys leisure activity. It might be a bridge club, a golf game or maybe a basketball game. We all understand the importance of getting away from the challenges of work and the hustle of home life for a little personal rejuvenation. Think about how you got to your last leisure activity. Perhaps you drove, or took a bus or a subway. Did you give the ride a second thought? Of course not, because the ride isn’t the point; the game is. Last week, the members of the amateur Kochav Hashachar adult basketball team—young men in their twenties and thirties—also didn’t think about their ride. They travelled to play against a local rival without giving the trip a second thought. On

the return home, as their car slowed in traffic, a terrorist [fired an automatic rifle](#) into one of the team's cars, wounding Yair Hoffer, Hananel Cohen and another player and killing Hebrew University student Malachi Rosenfeld, 25.

This, of course, is just the latest in a long string of planned attacks throughout Jewish history. One of the first planned attacks, mentioned in Parashat Pinchas, took place at the hands of the Midianites, who intentionally enticed the Israelites to sin in the hopes of causing their destruction. The plan almost worked, until Pinchas' action prevented calamity. Moses reacted strongly and instructed the nation to, "Harass the Midianites and smite them; for they harass you, by their wives (*benichleihem*) wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor..." (Numbers 25:17-18) Ibn Ezra translates the word *benichleihem* to mean "their wicked thoughts." Ramban explains that that "elders of Midian planned this wicked plan...and they gave this advice to the people of Moab..." to carry out. The plan to entice the Jews to sin with the daughters of Moab didn't happen on its own. It was a premeditated event initiated by Israel's adversaries and carried out by their proxies in a deliberate attempt to destroy the Jewish nation.

The terrorist attack last week was also not an isolated attack, but instead the actions of a cell in the West Bank who benefit from planning, leadership and financial support. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), "Security forces believe that the attack was carried out by a terror cell and not by an individual... [and] that the attack was planned in advance." For these cells to function, they require a chain of command, leadership structure, and a source of funding. According to [Ynet](#), "Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said...that the recent shooting terror attacks have been sanctioned by Hamas' international headquarters in Istanbul and funded by Iran."

This should not come as a surprise. While the world has focused, rightly so, on Iran's nuclear program, Iran has maintained its status as the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, providing weapons, money and training to groups whose goals include the destruction of Israel. Through its proxy armies of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the Iranian regime is supporting terrorists that have carried out attacks on American troops and Israeli civilians. Moreover, according to the newly-released 2014 State Department Country Reports on Terrorism, Iran's state sponsorship of terrorism remains "undiminished." Even as its citizens suffered under the biting economic sanctions against its nuclear program, Iran maintained its support for Hamas, Hezbollah, various groups in Iraq and Syria's Assad regime.

As the nuclear talks between the P5+1 and Iran head towards a conclusion, Iran's continued support for international terror represents yet another reason why the United States must not agree to a deal without unimpeded access to suspected nuclear sites and the lifting of sanctions only when Iran has proven to the international community that it has ended its quest for a nuclear weapons capability. Iran's funding of murder and terror across the Middle East must give the world great concern about the increased danger Iran would present across the globe should it gain access to nuclear weapons. Moreover, Iran's actions call into question our ability to trust Iran about its professed desire for nuclear technology for "peaceful purposes only."

For these reasons, a "good" deal must support "anytime, anywhere" inspections—including all military facilities—to verify Iranian compliance and only the gradual lifting of sanctions. Iran's decades-long history of cheating on international obligations suggests it will secretly attempt to continue its nuclear weapons program. Its undiminished state support for terrorism, even under the weight of current sanctions, gives no comfort to the notion that Tehran would invest the fruits of sanction relief solely to peaceful purposes.

The brutal murder of Malachi Rosenfeld serves as a chilling reminder of Iran's willingness to finance, support and plan programs that ultimately result in the killing of innocents. If Iran is willing to work so hard to kill just one Israeli, how much harder would it be willing to work, and how much longer would it be willing to wait, for the technology that would give it the power to kill millions? We must continue to remind our elected representatives that any agreement with Iran must be grounded in long term, verifiable actions by Iran that eliminate all potential pathways to a nuclear weapon. ■

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