



Sermon Tidbits

MAY 30, 2016

Parashat Bechukotai

Seeking Peace

And I will give peace in the land (Leviticus 26:6)

ונתתי שלום בארץ (ויקרא כו:ו)

When Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, called on Israel and the Palestinians to seize what he described as a “realistic” and “great” opportunity to reach a peaceful settlement to their decades-old conflict,” Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [responded immediately](#). “I welcome the remarks by Egyptian President Sissi and his readiness to make every effort to promote a future of peace and security between us and the Palestinians and the peoples of the region,” Netanyahu said. “Israel is ready to participate with Egypt and other Arab countries to promote the diplomatic process and the stability of the region. I appreciate President Sissi’s activities and am encouraged by the leadership he’s displaying also on this issue.” Israel has long declared—both through word and action—its desire to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement with all of its neighbors, including the Palestinians. After all, Judaism has always stressed the ultimate value and importance of peace.

Commenting on the Jewish value of peace, former IDF Chief Rabbi Mordechai Peron, in his work *The Uniqueness of the Nation Israel*, wrote, “Ideologically, Jewish thought completely negates the concept of war with all its negative manifestations, and sees peace a the ideal mission of humanity. This view is emphasized in the Bible, and has been expanded and developed in Talmudic and Midrashic literature. The harsh reality of any war, which means the loss of human life, destruction and annihilation, is described in a sharp and critical but realistic manner in many Midrashic sources. They contrast peace, with all the good inherent in it, with brutal, devastating, and catastrophic war. However, with the negativity of war, Judaism recognized the historical fact that as long as the earthly visions of the prophets of Israel concerning eternal peace have not been realized, is the duty of the Israeli nation to be alert and trained for war against the enemy.” This is the paradox with which we struggle: while we abhor war and make every effort to avoid it, we must also recognize the importance of strength and need to protect ourselves from dangerous aggressors that threaten us.

Both the United States and Israel share this paradox of striving for peace while still maintaining the strength necessary to protect their citizens. Two weeks ago, on Yom Hazikaron, Israel honored and remembered those who gave their lives protecting and defending the Jewish state. This week, we in the United States did the same, taking a day to remember and honor the brave soldiers who died serving in America’s armed forces, protecting and defending the peace we enjoy today.

Rabbi Yehoram Mazor, of the Reform Movement in Israel, writes, “The nation of Israel yearns for peace, even if sometimes it does not seem possible. [I] believe that the day when peace prevails in the country will come, and [I] learned this fact from the establishment of the state of Israel. Our fathers and mothers prayed every day for two things that were considered important: the return to Zion and peace...Just as we merited to build our land and our country again and fulfilled the hopes and prayers of generations, so too we will attain theirs and our prayer that the desired peace will come. We will continue to hope, pray and also act on behalf of peace.” This is our mission: to be a people with the strength and ability to defend ourselves, while also having the strength of character to seek the peace for which we all yearn and pray. ■

Facing Troubling Truths

And I will bring the land into desolation (Leviticus 26:32)

והשמתי אני את הארץ (ויקרא כה:יז)

What can you do in just eight minutes? A quick perusal of the last week's headlines reveals you can accomplish a great deal in eight minutes. Kanye West went on an [eight-minute rant](#) as he laid out his latest life philosophy to talk-show host Ellen DeGeneres last week. Additionally, the city of Niagara is proposing that commuters can save time by parking at their local airport and taking an [eight-minute flight](#) to Toronto. And, a senior Iranian military commander boasted that the Islamic Republic could destroy Israel in less than eight minutes. According to the [Times of Israel](#), Ahmad Karimpour, a senior adviser to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' elite unit al-Quds Force, said if Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei gave the order to destroy Israel, the Iranian military had the capacity to do so quickly. "If the Supreme Leader's orders [are] to be executed, with the abilities and the equipment at our disposal, we will raze the Zionist regime in less than eight minutes." This pronouncement came just weeks after Iran flouted the will of the international community by once again testing a precision-guided, medium-range ballistic missile, and two months after Iran conducted similar tests with missiles emblazoned with the words, "Israel must be wiped off the earth."

In truth, we don't need Iran to remind us of the destruction of the Jewish nation. We read about it in the Torah in the *tochecha*, or "rebuke" that appears in Bechukotai. Moses warns that should the nation fail to follow the teachings of the Torah, it would then suffer a series of increasingly severe setbacks. Ultimately, the nation would endure the greatest calamity: "And I will make your cities a waste, and will bring your sanctuaries unto desolation...And I will bring the land into desolation...and I will draw out the sword after you; and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste." (Leviticus 26:31-33) These verses are so disturbing that we read the *tochecha* in synagogue quickly, in a hushed tone. Why then does the Torah contain such a troubling section? Would it not be better to skip this section entirely? The answer lies in a passage in Proverbs (3:11-12): "My son, despite not the chastening of HaShem, neither spurn his correction; For whom HaShem loves G-d corrects..." Commenting on this phrase Malbim writes, "Rebuke is a sign of love, for through his love he will oversee to improve his ways and elevate him to a higher level..." It is never beneficial to avoid inconvenient truths. Moses lays the bare, troubling truth before the people to spur them to action. By graphically outlining the result of future failure, Moses calls on us to take the necessary measures to avoid the calamity that awaits should we refuse to act.

Recent events clearly indicate that Iran has not in fact changed, and that radical Islamic theocrats continues to dictate Iran's behavior, from its continued support of the terrorist goals of Hezbollah to its military provocations to its continued development of accurate and longer-range ballistic missiles. Recently, World Jewish Congress President Ronald Lauder [noted](#) that Iran's Holocaust-denying cartoon competition demonstrates that despite claims to the contrary, nothing in Iran has changed. "[The] Iranian government wants the world to believe that it would not use nuclear capabilities against Israel or the West," Lauder said. "But how is the world to believe such claims when the Islamic Republic continues to abet such disgusting and degrading forms of anti-Semitism and historical revisionism?"

Moses issued a strong warning of rebuke with troubling images of possible future calamity to motivate the Jewish people to take concrete steps to avoid the rebuke from becoming reality. Sadly, history demonstrates times that we failed to heed Moses' rebuke and suffered the consequences. The world cannot afford to make the same mistake with Iran. We must recognize the truth about Iran, and take the necessary steps to ensure that Iran's threat to destroy the Jewish state never comes to pass. ■

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