



Sermon Tidbits

JUNE 27, 2016

Parashat Shelach

A Powerful Partnership

Caleb...and Hoshea (Numbers 13:6,8)

כלב...ויהושע (במדבר יג,ו,ח)

A [new report that analyzed the positive effects of Israeli-founded companies](#) on the State of Massachusetts' economy revealed that the relationship between Israel and the state has brought a major influx of jobs and innovation. Also, it was reported that Israeli-founded companies in Massachusetts posted \$9.3 billion in revenue in the state in 2015, representing nearly 4 percent of the state's gross domestic product. Over the past three years, the revenue of Israeli-founded companies has grown twice as much as the overall Massachusetts economy and now, "Israeli businesses play a leading role in our state's robust economy, in both tech and life science and we greatly value our special relationship," said Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker. Like all good partnerships, each party shares its talents, resources and abilities to bring benefits to both sides. Caleb and Joshua would certainly agree.

After Moses selects representatives to scout the Promised Land on behalf of the nation, the Torah lists the name and tribe of each representative—a seemingly irrelevant piece of information. In the end, what difference does it make which spy represented each tribe? Rabbi Yaakov Meidan of Yeshivat Har Etzion suggests that by identifying the tribes we also learn about an important partnership that would one day bring about national redemption. As the spies issue their negative report, Joshua and Caleb courageously dissent, insisting that they could indeed conquer the Promised Land. Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim—the son of Joseph, while Caleb represented the tribe of Judah. The Sages teach us that ultimately the descendants of Joseph and Judah will work together to bring about the redemption of the Jewish nation. In fact, the Tosefta (Keritot 4:7) notes that while Joshua, who inherited Moses' role as national leader, is almost always mentioned before Caleb in the biblical text, in one instance (Numbers 14:30) Caleb is mentioned before Joshua "in order to teach us that they were both equal to each-other." Both Joshua and Caleb brought unique abilities to their partnership, and by acting together they demonstrated that when the two tribes destined for leadership combine their innate abilities, they have the potential and the power to redeem the nation.

This power of partnership represents an important ideological backbone for the U.S.-Israel relationship. Many of the concrete manifestations of the U.S.-Israel relationship stem from the power of partnership. These partnerships occur in numerous areas; between states like Massachusetts and California, between industries like energy and cyber-security, and between the American and Israeli defense establishments.

When lawmakers recently approved [continued funding increases for the U.S.-Israel Missile Defense program](#), one factor motivating them was their desire to help an important ally defend itself against the growing threat of missile attack from the terrorist groups stockpiling missiles and rockets along Israel's border. Yet, American lawmakers were also thinking about America's interests. Missile defenses promote stability in the Middle East by deterring Israel's foes from aggression, and Israeli systems provide intelligence and protection for U.S. forces and allies in the Middle East. In addition, America benefits from access to cutting edge, battle-proven technology. Vice Admiral James Syring, Director of the Missile Defense Agency, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that, "[We] have learned a lot from the performance and the design of [Israeli] interceptors...for David's Sling so we can take that information and use it to our advantage for our systems and our interceptors..."

Missile defense is just one of many areas where Israel and the United States have formed powerful partnerships that bring mutual benefits to both parties. Like Caleb and Joshua who worked together in the desert, when both countries bring their unique talents and capabilities together, great things happen. ■

Protecting and Upholding the Rights of Minorities

To stone them... (Numbers 14:10)

לרגום אותם באבנים (במדבר יד:י)

In the aftermath of the horrible murder of forty-nine people in the Pulse dance club in Orlando earlier this month, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [published a video](#) in which he offered his condolences to the LGBT community around the world. “Why did the terrorist murder them? Because he was driven by a fanatical hatred. He targeted the LGBT community because he believed they were evil. Now, the murderer wasn’t alone. Regimes and terrorist organizations around the world ruthlessly persecute the LGBT community. In Syria, ISIS throws gays off rooftops. In Iran, the regime hangs gays from cranes. Too many people have remained silent in the face of this awful persecution. This week’s shooting wasn’t merely an attack on the LGBT community. It was an attack on all of us, on our common values of freedom and diversity and choice.” Many regions around the world respond to words, acts, deeds or people they disapprove of or disagree with by eliminating them. The ancient Israelites almost made this same mistake.

Commentators go out of their way to stress that the spies were good people. According to the Midrash, (Tanchuma Shelach 4) the men chosen by Moses were “great” and “righteous” people. Nonetheless they erred. Of the twelve that returned from their forty-day mission to spy out the land, ten brought a negative report while only two spoke positively about the Land. The nation accepted the report of the majority, throwing the people into panic. Yet, Rabbi [Arik Ascherman of Rabbis for Human Rights](#) points out that the nation made a critical mistake. Instead of simply following the majority, the people took steps to silence the dissenters. When Caleb and Joshua spoke out positively and attempted to convince the people that they could indeed conquer the Land, “All the congregation spoke out to stone them with stones, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting unto all the children of Israel.” (14:10) Instead of simply rejecting the words of Joshua and Caleb, the people wanted to prevent them from speaking altogether. This final act of silencing their dissenters prompts Divine retribution upon the people. Rabbi Ascherman writes, “Parashat Shelach teaches us about silencing the minority. To what degree do institutions and communal leaders stand in the breach to protect the views of the minority, even when they themselves have a different view?”

Too many of Israel’s neighbors subscribe to a fundamentalist fanaticism devoted to snuffing out behaviors it considers immoral, inappropriate or even disagreeable to the regime. ISIS in Syria and Iraq is famous for its cruel and sadistic public executions of apostates, enemies, deviants—anyone that it considers a threat to its ideology. Earlier this year the [New York Times reported](#) that a Hamas commander in Gaza was executed for what the group called “moral turpitude, by which Hamas meant homosexuality.” According to a [recent study](#), Iran exposes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people “to horrific punishment, bullying and risk of suicide.” Contrast these horrible groups with Israel, which earlier this month held the [largest ever pride parade in its history](#).

Prime Minister Netanyahu concluded his remarks saying, “I have no doubt that those who seek to spread hate and fear will be defeated. Working together we will defeat them even faster. We need to stand united, resolute in the belief that all people regardless of their sexual orientation, regardless of their race, regardless of their ethnicity, all people deserve respect and deserve dignity.” ■

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