

AUGUST 15, 2016

Parashat Vaetchanan

Seeing it First-Hand

And you shall see with your eyes (Deuteronomy 3:25)

וראית בעיניך (דברים ג:כה)

As a Muslim growing up in London's Pakistani community, Kasim Hafeez grew up on anti-Israel propaganda. According to [The Times of Israel](#), as a student at Nottingham University, he joined the Islamic Society, where images of death and destruction perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinians were regularly screened at meetings, and Hafeez and his fellow students would harass students wearing overt Jewish symbols on campus, raising the issue of Palestine at every occasion. But, after reading Alan Dershowitz's "The Case for Israel," and finding himself unable to refute Dershowitz's arguments, he decided that the only way to resolve his questions would be to travel to Israel, which he did in 2007. Walking down the streets of Israel, Hafeez realized that many of the stories he was told about Israel were simply lies. "Once, I circled a bus stop twice, Hafeez said, looking for indications of racial segregation, a sign saying 'Arabs only.' I couldn't find any." Seeing the truth firsthand dramatically altered his perspective.

We know intuitively that there's a fundamental difference between hearing about something and seeing it with your own eyes. Moses understood this as well, which is why he yearned so greatly to experience the Promised Land firsthand. Even after being told that he would not lead the nation into Canaan, Moses still beseeches God, "Let me go over, please, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill-country, and Lebanon." (Deuteronomy 3:25) While his request is refused, he is assured that he will indeed see the Promised Land. He is told, "Climb up to the top of Pisgah, and lift up your eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold with your eyes..." (3:27) *Ohr Hachayim*, (on verse 27) commenting on the fact that Moses is specifically promised that he would see the Land with his "eyes," notes that, "Because there will be found wisdoms that bring close that which is distant through an intermediate device, that they place between their eyes opposite distant places which bring them close so that they are as if they are right before them. In order to negate [the use of this device] God said to him, 'And you will behold with your eyes' literally, meaning [that Moses would see] without an intermediary means."

Ohr Hachayim author Rabbi Chaim ben Attar of Morocco, (1696-1743) was almost certainly referring to the telescope, invented by Galileo in 1609, and vastly improved by Sir Isaac Newton in 1704. Thus, he noted that God promised that Moses would see the land not through a telescope, but would miraculously be given the ability to see the entire Land with his eyes, even though he would not be permitted to physically enter the land. Today, after incredible technological advancements of modern media, we now "see" far more from afar than ben Attar could have ever imagined. Yet, the idea his commentary conveys remains the same. Every "intermediary device" distorts the truth in some way. To see the real Israel, the only way to do so is with your own eyes.

Recently, U.S. Senator Steve Daines (R-MT) echoed this very notion when [he wrote about his recent visit to the Jewish state on his blog](#). Describing the experience of standing on Israel's northern border, hearing a bomb detonate in nearby Syria, with hundreds of Hezbollah rockets a short distance to the north in Lebanon, Daines wrote that, "It is one thing to read about Israel's security concerns in the news, but seeing the reality first hand is an incredible reminder of how vital our relationship is to maintain peace in the region, and the role that Montana plays in doing so. I will continue to always stand with Israel."

Last summer, House Democratic Whip [Steny H. Hoyer \(D-MD\)](#) traveled on an AIEF Educational Seminar in Israel

with 22 House Democrats. He stated that, “This trip gives Members of Congress an important opportunity to see the region first-hand and to meet with key Israeli and Palestinian leaders, which will give them a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the Middle East today, along with American interests in the region.”

Passionate advocates for Israel intuitively understand that the picture painted of Israel in the media is often sensationalized and inaccurate. First-time visitors to Israel are often shocked by the quiet, safety and openness pervasive in the Jewish state. In addition, harsh critics of Israel often either change—or at least soften—their tone when confronted first-hand with the reality of the security challenges that Israel faces each and every day. For this reason, we must continue to encourage our elected officials to visit Israel, so that they too can understand the core issues critical to Israel’s security. ■

Beyond the Letter of the Law

You shall do that which is right and good (Deuteronomy 6:18)

ועשית הישר והטוב (דברים ו:יח)

As part of its campaign for upcoming municipal elections, Hamas released a flashy video on YouTube called “Thanks Hamas.” According to [Ynet](#), “The video presents Gaza as one of the best places to live in the Middle East, offering an energetic and flourishing lifestyle. It is depicted as a developed location marked with impressive buildings and newly developed neighborhoods. The video shows spacious parks, lakes, city squares, sunny coastal beaches and people smiling in various places in the Strip holding signs bearing the words, ‘Thank you Hamas.’” Not surprisingly, the video forgot to note the country that has facilitated the transfer of goods and services that made the beautiful parks and malls full of goods possible: Israel. While Hamas continues its campaign of aggression, hatred and terror against Israel, the Jewish state has gone beyond the letter of the law, working to better the lives of Gazan citizens.

Going the extra mile, even though one is not legally required to do so, is not simply a good policy. It’s also a mitzvah in the Torah. Moses instructs the people that “You shall do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord, so that you may go and possess the Land...” (18:6) What is the difference between that which is “right” and that which is “good”? Aren’t deeds that are “right” also “good”? While we readily understand what it means to do “right”—to follow the law—Rashi (on verse 18) explains that in commanding us to do “good”—“This refers to compromise and acting beyond the letter of the law (in Hebrew—*lifnim mishurat hadin*).”

Going beyond the requirements of the law has been Israel’s attitude towards the civilian population of Gaza for over a decade. While Israel hoped that the disengagement and unilateral pullout from Gaza in 2005 would lead to regional calm and stability, the terrorist Hamas regime immediately engaged in a campaign of terrorism, guerilla warfare and rocket attacks, guided by its official goal to eradicate the Jewish state. Still, despite Hamas’ aggression, Israel has always expended great effort and energy in order to provide the citizens of Gaza the goods and materials they need to conduct daily life. Last week, the parents of Lt. Hadar Goldin, [conducted a memorial service](#) for their son as well as for Sgt. Oron Shaul, whose bodies have been held by Hamas since their fall in battle in 2014. The very same week, Israel’s authority for Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)—[tweeted](#) that over the course of the week 3,512 trucks carried 113,871 tons of goods into Gaza, including medical supplies, electronic devices, consumer goods and construction materials, 1.3 million liters of auto fuel, 1.8 million liters of heating fuel and 1,300 tons of natural gas for household use.

Few if any nations around the world facilitate the needs of a neighbor actively digging tunnels aimed at kidnapping and murdering its citizens. Israel has always followed the ethic of the Torah demanding that we act *lifnim meshurat hadin*—beyond the letter of the law—in its desire to provide for the needs of the civilian population of Gaza. ■

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