



Sermon Tidbits

JANUARY 18, 2016

Parashat Beshalach

Funding to Protect the Future

And the Children of Israel went up armed (Exodus 13:18) **וַחֲמוּשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (שְׁמוֹת יג:יח)**

The Israeli Air Force announced this December that the David's Sling Missile Defense system had [passed its final test and is now fully operational](#), this represented an important achievement for both Israel and the United States. It also served as the culmination of a long, challenging development program that was years in the making. The program, designed to counter the threat of medium-to-long-range rockets with ranges between 43 and 155 miles, originally began a decade ago in 2006. Because American leadership recognized the need to both plan and fund for the future, the joint Israeli-American project received the support critical to build a system that will protect Israel and America's interests around the world from medium-range missile attacks.

As they were leaving Egypt, the Israelites similarly recognized the need to prepare to defend themselves in the future. We read that when the Children of Israel left Egypt during the Exodus, *vachamushim alu*—"the Children of Israel went up armed out of the Land of Egypt." This translation follows the interpretation of Rashi (on verse 18) who explains that, "*chamushim* denotes 'armed'—that [God] caused them to go up armed...and this verse was written only to make understood [that which follows], so that you would not wonder regarding the war with Amalek and regarding the war of Sihon and Og and Midian, 'From where did they have weapons of war?'" Simply put, the Children of Israel anticipated that they would need to defend themselves from outside attackers, as well as to fight to conquer the Promised Land, so they took weapons with them. While they may not have needed weapons immediately, they realized that they must be prepared for the potential of attacks in the future.

Today, our work to support a strong U.S.-Israel relationship follows that ancient, but sensible model. Only a few weeks ago, Congress passed its annual spending bill, which included a number of key pro-Israel provisions including \$3.1 billion in security assistance to Israel, ensuring that Israel has the means to defend herself against mounting threats. The measure also included \$487 million for U.S.-Israel missile defense programs (more than triple President Obama's budget request for fiscal year 2016). In addition, the bill provides \$200 million for additional U.S. arms stockpiles in Israel, which can be used by Israel in emergency situations, as well as \$40 million for a new U.S.-Israel tunnel detection program to help Israel combat the growing threat of underground terrorist tunnels from Gaza and Lebanon. Both of the latter measures represent the realization that the United States can and should take measures today in order to ensure that Israel will be able to adequately deal with security threats in the future.

American support for Israel not only provides Israel critical funds to help defend the Jewish state today, it has always looked forward, anticipating needs and allocating funds to create solutions to protect the people of Israel not only now but for the future. ■

A Moral Nation

The Lord is a man of war (Exodus 15:3)

ה' אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה (שְׁמוֹת טו:ג)

With the ongoing wave of violence against Israeli civilians, including car rammings, stabbings and shootings, medics across Israel could very well face a daunting ethical dilemma: who do you treat first? Imagine a first-responder

arriving at a scene to find two injured people: the victim, who has been stabbed and moderately wounded, and her terrorist assailant, who was shot by police and whose life is in danger. Who do you first treat: the terrorist, or his victim? This question has been the subject of a vociferous and ongoing debate in Israel. While a previous directive, based on the principal of “charity begins at home,” instructed the medic to first treat the victim and then tend to the assailant, last month the Israeli Medical Association changed its policy. According to [Israel Hayom](#), “Under the revised directive, patients are to be prioritized on the basis of medical considerations only. This means first responders may face situations where they must treat a terrorist before tending to the victims.” While the change in policy prompted vigorous debate in Israel, it reflects the aspiration of Israel to hold itself, even as it endures brutal, barbaric attacks, to a high moral standard.

After the splitting of the Reed Sea and the miraculous salvation of the Jewish nation and the destruction of the Egyptian army, Moses gathers the nation to sing the famous song of divine praise known as “Az Yashir.” In the song the nation gives praise to God for the incredible deliverance from certain destruction. “This is my God, and I will glorify God; my father’s God, and I will exalt God; Adonai is a person of war, Adonai is God’s name” (15:2-3) Commentators note an apparent contradiction between the different divine descriptions in the verse. On one hand, the nation describes God as “A person of war,” yet in the very same verse they declare that, “Adonai is God’s name,” using the four-letter name (Yud-Hay-Vav-Hay) that represents the divine aspect of compassion and mercy. How can God be both compassionate and merciful, and “a person of war” in the very same breath? Rashi (on verse 3) explains: “Even at the time when God wages war and avenges oneself of one’s enemies, he retains the attribute of having mercy on one’s creatures and of sustaining the entire world. And [this is] not like the nature of earthly kings, who when engaged in war turn away from all other pursuits and has no strength to do both this and that.” The Midrash (*Mechilta*) adds that even when God is engaged in war, “...God hears the cries of all the world’s inhabitants...”

Throughout most of world history, war represented a time of cruelty and harshness, leaving little room for compassion and mercy. Any attempt to balance the brutality of war with the values of kindness and compassion was something that only God could accomplish, but not “earthly kings.” Yet, over the past century, humankind has continually adjusted its moral compass, creating a set of rules and standards for moral engagement during times of military conflict.

In recent years, Israel has distinguished itself in the area of wartime morality, taking almost extraordinary efforts to protect the lives of innocent civilians and provide for their needs, even during the heat of battle. Late last year, the “High Level Military Group—made up of retired generals and defense officials from Germany, Colombia, India, Spain, Australia, the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Italy—found that Israel not only abided by the laws of armed conflict, but far surpassed their requirements,” the [Times of Israel reported](#). In its 80-page report, which followed testimony submitted to the United Nation Human Rights Commission in June, the members of the group—which included the former chairman of the NATO military committee, the former chief of staff of the Italian army, a former U.S. ambassador-at-large on war crimes and the former director-general of the Indian Defense Intelligence Agency—argued that Israel “adopted a far higher level of restraint than other militaries.” Israeli efforts included numerous warnings to non-combatants to leave the scene of an impending attack, and multiple examples of missions canceled due to potential non-combatant casualties. Even more recently, while the Hamas-led government in Gaza [extolls the terrorists who murder innocent Israeli citizens](#) as martyrs and heroes, Israel [continues to facilitate the passage of goods and people](#) into and out of the Gaza Strip, including millions of tons of materials for reconstruction, a doubling of Gaza’s water supply, entry permits for medical care and business purposes, all aimed at improving the lives of the Palestinian population in Gaza.

Despite the challenges, Israelis remain committed to the values of kindness and compassion—even when facing unmitigated cruelty. In doing so, the people of Israel refuse to allow the violence and brutality of terrorism and war to infect their moral compass, and instead insist on retaining the divine attributes of mercy, even when forced to fight to protect their country from enemies bent at their destruction. ■

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