

FEBRUARY 15, 2016

Parashat Tetzaveh

Watch Your Words

And you shall command... (Exodus 27:20)

וַאֲתָה תְצַוֶּה (שְׁמוֹת כז:כ)

From the story of his birth at the beginning of Exodus through the end of the Torah in Deuteronomy, Moses is mentioned, by name, in every single parashah except one: Tetzaveh. While the text of Tetzaveh certainly refers to Moses—“And you shall command,” (27:20) “And you shall bring near to you Aaron, your brother” (28:1)—Moses’ name seems intentionally absent. The Sages in the Midrash, noting this curious fact, suggest that Moses’ missing name stems from a seemingly unrelated event. After the sin of the Golden Calf, God suggests that it might be better to destroy the entire nation, and begin a new nation with Moses and his descendants. Moses returns with an ultimatum: “Now, if You will forgive their sin...and if not, please erase me from Your book which You have written.” (Exodus 32:32) In a powerful act of self-sacrifice and leadership, Moses casts his lot with the nation and tells God: If you destroy them, then kill me with them and erase me from the Bible completely. The Sages in the Midrash (Midrash Agadah) offer Moses a small measure of rebuke, not for his valiant defense of the people, but for his choice of words. Why does Moses not appear in Parashat Tetzaveh? “Because Moses, regarding the nation’s forgiveness for the [sin of the] Golden Calf said something bad: ‘And if not, please erase me from Your book which You have written’. The curse of a righteous person—even when offered conditionally—comes to pass. Said the Holy One: I will judge you favorably and erase you from My book, but only from the order of ‘And you shall command’ (Parashat Tetzaveh).”

Judaism has always cautioned leaders in positions of power to choose their words carefully. “The curse of the righteous... comes to pass.” Leaders, especially today, must recognize that their words can cause great harm if they do not take care to choose them carefully and wisely. Sadly, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon failed to heed this basic piece of advice, and his unfortunate choice of words continues to have grave repercussions against the citizen of the Jewish state. In a speech to the United Nations Security Council last month, Secretary General Moon offered a scathing rebuke of Israel, claiming that Palestinian violence is the result of “frustration,” and asserting that “it is human nature to react to occupation, which often serves as a potent incubator of hate and extremism,” [Ynet reported](#). Moon’s words seem to offer a justification for the many acts of terror that have claimed the lives of at least [twenty-eight Israelis](#) over the last four months in shootings, stabbings and car-ramming attacks. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu condemned Moon’s statement, [saying](#), “The comments of the UN Secretary General encourage terror. There is no justification for terror... The Palestinian murderers do not want to build a state, they want to destroy a state and they say it out loud. They want to murder Jews wherever they are and they say so out loud.”

Predictably, Palestinians immediately began quoting Moon’s words as justification for the ongoing terror campaign. Israel Hayom [reported last week](#) that, “Over the weekend, the Palestinian Authority’s Jerusalem-based spokesman Rafat Alian stated that the ‘occupation’ of the ‘Palestinian nation’ demands a ‘natural response.’ He was speaking about last week’s foiling of a coordinated three-man terrorist assault near Jerusalem’s Damascus Gate in which a 19-year-old Israeli Border Policewoman, Hadar Cohen, was killed. In an official letter sent to Moon, Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon demanded he take back his words. “Since when is it the UN’s role to find justifications for terror? Since when does the UN create two categories for terror and victims? I call on you to take back your statements and say clearly that there is no justification for the bloodshed of Israeli victims,” wrote Danon.

In Avot 1:11 we read the jarring message of Avtalyon who taught that, “Wise people—choose your words carefully, lest you be exiled [through the effects of your words]. The Meiri in his commentary on Avot explains that wise and righteous leaders must beware not to make statements which can then be interpreted to cause harm and destruction to others. Sadly, the Secretary General of the United Nations failed to take this critical message into account when he justified the murder of innocent civilians. Now, Israelis are paying the ultimate price for his reckless speech. ■

At Great Expense

And you shall command... (Exodus 27:20)

וְאַתָּה תְּצַוֶּה (שְׁמוֹת כ"ז)

In recent weeks, the threat of Hamas' terror tunnels has raised concern that the radical Islamic group is planning a major attack to kill and kidnap Israeli civilians. The recent collapse of several tunnels after heavy rainfall in Israel, which killed a number of Hamas fighters, highlighted the fact that Hamas has maintained a round-the-clock vigil of workers using heavy machinery to dig tunnels up the 300 feet underground. According to [Ynet](#), IDF Chief of Staff General Gadi Eisenkot said that stopping Hamas' tunnel threat is “at the top of the IDF's list of priorities...The threat of offensive tunneling is the number one mission this year.” How much will a complete anti-tunneling system cost to protect the citizens who live on the Gaza border? According to Israel's [Channel 2 News](#), Israel's Defense Ministry requested 2.5 billion shekels to develop a unique system designed to identify and neutralize tunnels around the Gaza Strip. At this point, the Defense Ministry has identified the twenty kilometers adjacent to population areas in the Gaza region as its first priority due the proximity to Israeli citizens and the greatest potential danger. Creating a tunnel detection system on that portion alone will cost 900 million shekels. According the military officials, the army has developed a unique system that will properly address the tunnels. This system could be operational along the entire 65 kilometer border around the Gaza Strip along the border. The one issue currently holding back system deployment: the cost.

When relaying the commandment that Aaron must light the menorah in the Tabernacle each and every day, Moses is instructed to convey the mitzvah in an unusual manner. “And you shall command the children of Israel that they bring to you pure olive oil beaten for the light to cause a lamp to burn continually.” (verse 20) Normally, Moses is told to “speak to the Children of Israel.” Yet, here he is instructed to “command” them. Why the unusually assertive language? Rabbi Yaakov Ben Asher, in his *Ba'al Haturim* commentary (on verse 20), explains that since the Menorah required “pure olive oil,” which was lit every day of the year from morning until night, this commandment entailed a significant financial outlay. “For this reason, it was necessary to utilize language of commandment in order to require alacrity in fulfilling this mitzvah,” to ensure that the nation would never grow negligent in its performance.

Cost plays a role in every decision we make. Yet, if the cause is truly important, sometimes a little bit of extra encouragement is necessary to justify the expense. It is for this reason that we must voice our support and encouragement for a robust package of American security assistance for Israel. The U.S. president's budget for fiscal year 2017 included \$3.1 billion in security assistance for Israel, in accordance with the 2007 U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Security Assistance. With negotiations currently underway on a new agreement to ensure Israel has the resources to defend itself, the U.S. Congress and the President must keep in mind the soaring costs of advanced weaponry. To combat the region's mounting threats, Israel—a tiny nation the geographic size of New Jersey—has been forced to spend more on defense as a percentage of its GDP than virtually any other nation in the industrialized world. In addition to the exorbitant cost of the Gaza tunnel defense system, a single F-35 Joint Strike Fighter will cost Israel around \$110 million.

A core element of American policy is to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge (QME)—the ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat while sustaining minimal damages and casualties. As Israel faces unprecedented threats to its security and must develop and purchase new and expensive systems to neutralize those threats, we must encourage the President to recognize this new reality and provide Israel with the necessary support to maintain its Qualitative Military Edge into the next decade. ■

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