

JULY 10, 2017

Parashat Pinchas

Combatting the Tragedy of Human Trafficking

Cozbi, the daughter of Zur (Numbers 25:15)

כזבי בת צור (במדבר כה:טו)

Today, the practice of human trafficking exists around the world in many forms, including prostitution, forced labor, domestic servitude and slavery. Each year, the U.S. State Department issues a detailed annual report grading countries outlining the worst offenders of this horrible crime. According to the [New York Times](#), among the more than twenty lowest-rated countries this year were China, Iran, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela. As strong supporters of the state of Israel, we note with pride that for the sixth consecutive year, Israel received the highest national ranking in its fight against human trafficking, one of thirty-six nations around the world to be ranked in the top tier. According to the [report](#), “[Israel’s] government demonstrated serious and sustained efforts by identifying and providing protective services to victims of all forms of trafficking... The government continued to implement strong anti-trafficking prevention measures.”

At the end of Parashat Balak, we learn that, “the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab...” (25:1) Who were these “daughters of Moab? Why were they engaged in harlotry? We find an indication in Parashat Pinchas, where we read that Pinchas killed Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Simeon who challenged Moses’ moral authority, as well as “Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he was the tribal head of an ancestral house in Midian.” (25:15) How did Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, end up in a prostitution ring? The Midrash explains that the Moabites, following the advice of the wicked prophet Balaam, decided to bring destruction upon the Jews by enticing them into sexual impropriety by conscripting their daughters as prostitutes. “[This verse teaches us] to what extent the Midianites [despised Israel] and desecrated themselves: For they [even] desecrated the daughter of a king...Zur, who was greater than all of them as he was a king of Midian and he desecrated his daughter—so who would he not desecrate?” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:3) The people of Midian engaged in the human trafficking of their own daughters by forcing them into prostitution to weaken the enemy. That Parashat Pinchas begins praise for Pinchas’ bravery in fighting this evil demonstrates the Jewish commitment to creating a fair and safe world.

Israel recognizes this important commitment today and actively combats such exploitation through a [special government branch](#) dedicated to coordinating its anti-trafficking effort. According the State Department report, in 2016, Israel initiated 310 investigations for potential trafficking crimes and began to disburse money to trafficking victims from a new fund designated to fight human trafficking funded from money confiscated from traffickers. “Israel’s government continued to provide a wide range of protective services for victims of all forms of trafficking,” including shelters for men and women that offered rehabilitation services, such as job training, medical treatment, language training, and legal assistance.”

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson [noted](#) that human trafficking “splinters families, distorts global markets, undermines the rule of law, and spurs other transnational criminal activity. It threatens public safety and national security. But worst of all, the crime robs human beings of their freedom and their dignity.” According to [IsraelHayom](#), the people of Israel strongly agree. Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, who took pride in the Israeli efforts recognized by the State department, declared that Israel “will continue to act so that the phenomenon of modern-day slavery disappears from our region.” ■

Imminent Danger from the North – Haftarah for Pinchas

Out of the north the evil shall break forth (Jeremiah 1:14)

מצפון תפתח הרעה (ירמיה א:יד)

During her recent visit to Israel, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley toured Israel's northern border with Lebanon, where she received a briefing from United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) commander Major General Michael Beary. During the briefing, Beary described the situation on the border as stable, one which does not require further intervention. According to the [Times of Israel](#), Israel's deputy chief of staff, Major General Aviv Kochavi disagreed and the two reportedly got into a heated argument in front of Ambassador Haley. "Kochavi...told Haley that UNIFIL was not doing its jobs properly and was wary of entering the villages and cities of southern Lebanon and confronting Hezbollah." Instead of "ensuring the immediate cessation" of attacks by Hezbollah, the U.N. peace mission seems to look the other way as Hezbollah upgrades its rocket and missile arsenal pointed at Israel.

Danger from the north is a primary theme of this week's Haftarah. As we commemorate the 17th of Tammuz, the first day of the summer period of mourning that culminates with Tisha B'av, we read special *haftarot*. The first Haftarah, from the first Chapter of Jeremiah, outlines the divine warning of an imminent Babylonian attack on the Jewish inhabitants of the Land. "And the word of the Lord came to me the second time, saying: 'What do you see?' And I said: 'I see a seething pot; and the face on it is from the north.' Then the Lord said to me: 'Out of the north the evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.'" (Jeremiah 1:14-15) The phrase, *mitzafon tipatach hara'ah*—"Out of the north the evil shall break forth" highlights the threat the Jews faced in the north. Beyond reflecting the reality of a dangerous border, this phrase can also be explained metaphysically. The Midrash explains "There are four winds in the world...the wind from the corner of the north was created, but not completed. [The Holy One] said that anyone claiming to be a god should come and complete this corner that I have left so that they know that he is truly a god. There dwell evil spirits, demons, thunder and lightning. And from there evil emerges into the world, as it is written, 'Out of the north the evil shall break forth...'" (*Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* Chapter 3)

The threat posed by the north is a theme that persists today. In 2014, Israeli Major General Pesach Malovany [published a book](#) about the threat of the Syrian army called, "Out of the North the Evil Shall Break Forth." While the Syrian army currently seems preoccupied, Israel's north remains a grave source of danger. Hezbollah's ranks now number over 40,000, of whom thousands are now battle-tested from fighting in the Syrian civil war. It has amassed a bigger and more destructive weapons stockpile that now includes 150,000 rockets and missiles. Several thousand long- and medium-range munitions have sophisticated guidance systems that support pinpoint targeting, putting every Israeli city, town and military installation within reach. Hezbollah can now launch well over 1,000 rockets per day, as compared with 120 per day in 2006.

Israel's dangerous northern border is why American missile defense support is critically important. Though this year Israel [successfully deployed the David's Sling missile defense system](#), more time is needed to bring the system up to its full capability. Congressional missile defense assistance thus remains a critical piece of Israel's defense puzzle. The House Appropriations Committee and the House and Senate Armed Services Committees' defense appropriations and authorizations bills provided a total of \$705 million for research and development and procurement funding for the Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow-2 and Arrow-3 U.S.-Israel cooperative missile defense systems. This funding represents a \$558 million increase above the President's budget request for these programs, and \$105 million over last year's adopted funding level. These funds will help Israel defend its citizens against rocket and missile threats, and contribute to America's missile defense programs.

We must encourage our elected officials to ensure that these critical funds are included in the final versions of the Fiscal Year 2018 defense authorization and appropriations bills. Jeremiah's fateful words that evil comes "from the North" remain accurate today. It is up to us to ensure that the Jewish state has the means, and the missile defense, to defend itself from that danger. ■

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