

MAY 15, 2017

Parashat Behar-Bechukotai

The Metaphysical Value of Peace

And I will give peace in the land (Leviticus 26:6)

ונתתי שלום בארץ (ויקרא כו:ו)

On November 22, 1967, in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 242, which called for the “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict” as well as the “termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.” The U.N. called upon Israel to relinquish territory it conquered during the war in exchange for peace and normalization with its neighbors. In May of 1968, Gideon Rafael, Israel’s ambassador to the U.N., accepted the terms of the resolution saying, “My government has indicated its acceptance of the Security Council resolution for the promotion of agreement on the establishment of a just and lasting peace. I am also authorized to reaffirm that we are willing to seek agreement with each Arab State on all matters included in that resolution.” Why was Israel willing to make such significant concessions for the sake of peace agreements when it found itself in a position of strength? Judaism teaches us that peace isn’t just a practical consideration, but instead an overarching spiritual value.

Among the blessings that are promised to the Jewish people should we follow and adhere to the Torah, is the blessing of peace. We read that God promises, “You shall eat your bread until you have enough, and dwell in your land safely; And I will give peace in the land...” (26:5-6). Commenting on the connection between the blessings of prosperity and peace, Rashi (on verse 6) notes that, “You might say, ‘Here is food, and here is drink, but if there is no peace, there is nothing!’ Scripture, therefore, states, after all this [blessing], ‘I will grant peace in the Land.’ From here, [we learn] that peace is equal to everything else.” What is Rashi teaching us? What is the added value of peace over prosperity?

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein [explains](#) that peace is much more than the practical benefit that it brings. “It seems that Rashi’s intention is not to teach us that peace is preferable to economic success from only a practical perspective. Rather, in contradistinction to physical wealth, peace represents an important value from a spiritual and metaphysical perspective. In the final Mishnah in the Shas (*Uktzin* 3:12) we read: ‘Said Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta: The Holy One could not find a better vessel to bring blessing to Israel than peace.’ We learn from this Mishnah that the value of peace is not significant only for us, as human beings. Rather, the Holy One also gives peace preference over other blessings. From here we have another proof for the importance of peace as an overarching spiritual value...This matter is very important with relation to the ongoing public debate over territorial compromise. Those who reject [territorial concessions] base their position on various claims, but one of the more significant among them—which at times is not explicitly expressed, but only alluded to ‘between the lines’—is a disparagement of the importance of peace in contrast to other values. We must reject these types of positions firmly and forcefully! It is forbidden to forget the spiritual, metaphysical value of peace and to yearn to achieve that peace. If we present peace only as a key for prosperity and integration into the Middle East, then it is clearly possible to oppose. But we may not forget the spiritual-religious value of peace, through which the Holy One is also glorified. When we speak about peace from this perspective, we are then obligated to join in that yearning for peace.”

On June 19, 1967, mere days after successfully defending itself in the Six-Day War and long before the passage of UNSC Resolution 242, the Israeli government offered to return sovereignty over the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt,

provided it was demilitarized. Additionally, Israel offered a withdrawal to the 1922 international border with Syria, provided that the Golan Heights were demilitarized and subject to a commitment that the headwaters of the Jordan in Syria would not be diverted. While the offers were rejected by Egypt and Syria, it reflected Israel's desire and willingness to make painful compromises for peace with its neighbors. Israel does this because it realizes that peace is not just a practical goal. Rather, Israel considers peace a spiritual, metaphysical ideal it must aspire to achieve. Even if peace requires Israel to make great sacrifices, that is a price that Israel has always been willing to pay. ■

Bringing the Blessing of Water to the World

I will give your rains in their season (Leviticus 26:4)

ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם (ויקרא כו:ד)

When the United States National Guard conducted a disaster simulation in Indiana this week, [two Israeli groups took part in the drill](#). During a simulation of an earthquake disaster, members of the International Rescue Unit of the Israeli emergency response group ZAKA took part. In addition, the disaster exercise also involved the participation of Israeli company Water Gen, which has developed cutting-edge machinery capable of extracting water from thin air. During the drill, which assumed that the municipal water system had been compromised, participants utilized Water Gen's technology to immediately provide water to rescue workers and the injured at the scene of the disaster.

This isn't the first time that Jews have produced water from thin air. Jews have been known for providing desperately needed water for centuries. The Mishnah (*Taanit* 3:8) relates the famous story of the first-century sage Honi the Circle Drawer. When drought conditions persisted well into the winter threatening the sustenance of the community, Honi drew a circle in the dust, stood inside it, and informed God that he would not move until it rained. When it began to drizzle, Honi told God that he was not satisfied and expected more rain; it then began to pour. He explained that he wanted a calm rain, at which point the rain calmed to a normal rain. The Mishnah notes that Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach sent Honi the message that in truth he should be excommunicated for such brazen behavior towards God, "But what can I do to you, for you sin before God like a child sins before a son, and the Holy One fulfills your will." The notion that Jews had the ability to bring rain through the power of prayer persisted not only in Jewish circles, but among non-Jewish communities as well. Professor Yaakov Shpiegel [lists](#) a number of later examples in which the non-Jewish host community turned to the Jews to bring rain during times of drought, writing that these non-Jews "considered this a test of the Jewish religion, while the Jews for their part saw this as an opportunity to sanctify the name of God [through good works]." As one example, he brings a comment of Rabbi Abraham Saba, in his *Tzror HaMor* commentary on the Torah on our Parashah. Should the Jews follow the statutes of the Torah, among the blessings they are promised is the critical blessing of rain, without which survival would not be possible. But, rather than promise to "Give you rain," the verse promises to "give *your* rains." Rabbi Saba, who was among the exiles from Spain in 1492, writes that, "This teaches us that the rain is ours...and this is a source of praise of our strength when the nations accepted us [among them], for we know how to bring the waters in their time [through prayer]."

Water Gen, which has developed technology that produces [drinkable water by distilling it from the humidity in the air](#), has already signed a number of agreements that will bring water to parched areas of the globe. According to the Jerusalem Post, Water Gen has "signed a memorandum of understanding to install its technology in Vietnam's capital city...[and] inked another memorandum with India's Vikram Solar Pvt. Ltd., to deploy solar powered Water Gen units in remote parts of the subcontinent." The company plans to construct a Water Gen factory in Hanoi which will produce industrial-scale water generators for the municipality, with a total capacity of up to 10,000 liters of water per day, Vietnamese news sites reported. "Our solution is 20 times cheaper than the solution for drinking water that they have," Water Gen executive chairman Maxim Pasik said. "[And] what they drink is not healthy."

Prayer has always represented a fundamental tool to bring divine blessing—including water—to the world. Today, in addition to our spiritual blessings, people in Israel have developed a groundbreaking way to bring the blessing of water to parched countries across the globe. ■

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