

MAY 29, 2017

Shavuot and Parashat Naso

Walking Together - Shavuot

So they went (Ruth 1:19)

ותלכנה שניהם (רות א:יט)

During President Trump's visit to Israel last week, he emphatically reaffirmed America's rock-solid alliance with Israel. While such support should never be taken for granted, there was another, seemingly innocuous, episode that captured the hearts and minds of many Israelis. In a [Facebook post](#), Israeli diplomat George Deek describes a touching moment between First Lady Melania Trump and Nechama Rivlin, First Lady of Israel. "Nechama Rivlin...welcomed the First Lady Melania Trump at the door. As they were about to walk inside, Nechama whispered to Melania that she will do her best to catch up with the walking pace, but she might be a bit slower because of her medical condition which requires her to use an oxygen tank. Melania took her hand, looked at her and said: 'We'll walk at any pace you choose'. And so they walked, slowly, gracefully and proudly, hand in hand."

On the holiday of Shavuot, the image of two women—one older and another younger—walking together, conjures a very famous, ancient pair of women. In the book of Ruth we read about Naomi, who had lost her husband and sons in Moab and decided to return alone to her ancient homeland. When her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, declare their intention to join her, she warns them off, certain of the difficult life that would await them as strangers in a foreign land. While Orpah relents and returns home, Ruth remains steadfast, and her declaration of fealty to Naomi represents the archetypical declaration of faith by the convert: "Where you go I will go; and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God" (1:16). When Naomi finally realized that she could not convince Ruth to return home and that Ruth's devotion to her was indeed unshakable, she stopped arguing and then we read, "So they went..." Literally, the Hebrew *vatelachnah sheneihem* means "And the two of them went." Sixteenth century commentator Rabbi Shmuel Uzida, in his *Iggeret Shmuel* commentary on Ruth, notes the powerful image of the two women walking together and comments simply that they walked, "With one heart." In the *Da'at Mikra* commentary on Ruth, Fivel Meltzer adds that the word *sheneihem*—"the two of them"—is superfluous. The verse simply could have said that "they walked." By noting that they were two, the verse emphasizes just how different they were; the elderly matron Naomi returning to her homeland, while the young Ruth was leaving hers. By all rights, they should walk at a different pace, with different thoughts, anxieties and expectations. For this reason the verse emphasizes that they walked together—as one—each devoted to the needs, pace and concerns of the other.

In his Facebook post, Deek continues: "That silent gesture has neither any political significance nor any colorful tone to it, but it is everything. It is the hope we yearn for when we speak of peace; It is the kindness we wish to protect when we speak of defeating terror; It is the dignity we want to teach when we speak of stopping hate; It is the friendship we pray for when we speak of our unbreakable bond; In other words, this gesture encompasses everything that is good, kind and human." While Melania Trump may not have had any political intention with her gesture, her willingness to walk hand in hand with Mrs. Rivlin carried great meaning. Without using words, Mrs. Trump articulated the United States' willingness and desire to walk hand-in-hand with Israel. Our country proudly gives critical military aid to Israel, which must contend with enemies sitting across its borders bent on its destruction. It supports Israel in her [efforts to achieve a lasting peace](#). And it shares intelligence, technology and best practices with our key ally in the Middle East.

Tradition teaches that when Naomi and Ruth walked together so long ago, they ultimately joined forces and gave birth to the Davidic line that redeemed the Jewish people. They taught us that when two people—or two nations—walk together with one heart, they have the power to change the world. ■

Distancing from Dangerous Behavior – Parashat Naso

To utter a vow, the vow of a Nazirite (Numbers 6:2)

לְנָזִיר נָזִיר (בַּמִּדְבָּר ו:ב)

The Sages in the Midrash often invest great significance with the association of two seemingly unrelated topics in the biblical text. We find one such example in our *parashah*. Immediately following the section of the Sotah, the ancient laws that addressed suspected infidelity in a marriage, we find the section of the Nazirite. Jewish law delineates strict rules regarding an individual who takes a Nazirite oath, prohibiting him or her from consuming any wine or grape products, becoming ritually impure, and cutting of hair. Why does the Torah relate these two seemingly unconnected laws in succession? Rashi (on verse 2) quoting the Talmud (Sotah 2a) explains that the two sections are put side by side, “to teach you that anyone who witnesses the Sotah in her degradation should vow to abstain from wine which leads to infidelity.” The individual who has witnessed the jarring sight of the Sotah during the ritual in the Temple would be in a more fragile mental state, and therefore more susceptible to sinful behavior. For this reason, the two sections are connected to convey the notion that it is most appropriate for such a person to take a Nazirite oath in order to distance himself to the greatest possible degree from behavior which could lead down a dangerous, destructive path.

The juxtaposition of the saga of the Sotah with the laws of the Nazirite reminds us of the importance of distancing oneself from dangerous, harmful behavior. It is precisely for this reason that the United States must continue to encourage Iran to distance itself from its dangerous development of ballistic missile technology.

With the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, the world hoped that Iran would use the opportunity of relaxed economic sanctions to not only cease its nuclear weapons program, as stipulated in the agreement, but to also moderate its dangerous behavior throughout the Middle East. Sadly, this has not come to pass. While the JCPOA has temporarily pushed back Iran’s breakout time to a nuclear weapon, it has neither curbed its nuclear ambitions nor reduced Iran’s aggressive behavior in the region. Iran continues to sponsor radical terrorist groups including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, even as it seeks to export its revolutionary ideology abroad. In addition, Iran continues to develop its ballistic missile technology, designing and testing missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. In doing so, Iran is explicitly flouting the will of the international community, which in 2015 unanimously adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, which, “calls upon Iran not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology.”

To counter and curb Iran’s dangerous behavior, Reps. Ed Royce (R-CA) and Eliot Engel (D-NY) have introduced the [Iran Ballistic Missiles and International Sanctions Enforcement Act](#) (H.R. 1698), which mandates sanctions on Iranian government agencies or instrumentalities seeking to acquire goods or services that materially contribute to Iran’s ballistic missile program, as well as on persons or entities that knowingly export, transfer or permit the transfer to Iran of any goods or technologies that materially contribute to Iran’s ability to acquire or develop ballistic missiles or ballistic missile launch technologies. Last week, newly re-elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani insisted that, “Tehran would continue its ballistic missile program,” [Reuters reported](#). Despite his insistence that the missiles are for “peaceful purposes, and not for attack”, Iran’s violent, radical track record must give the international community great cause for concern.

We must incentivize Iran to distance itself from its dangerous behavior. New economic sanctions will give the United States the financial tools it needs to coerce Iran to abandon a ballistic missile program that has the potential to threaten the safety and security of people around the world. ■

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