

SEPTEMBER 11, 2017

Parashat Netzavim-Vayelech

Standing Ready

You are standing this day (Deuteronomy 29:9)

אתם נצבים היום (דברים כט:ט)

For the past forty years, international troops have been stationed by the United Nations in southern Lebanon, tasked with the mission of maintaining peace between Israel and her northern neighbor. UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) was created by the Security Council in March 1978 and is currently tasked with the job of helping the Lebanese government ensure there are no weapons outside of the government's control in the area near Israel. Yet, according to United States Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, UNIFIL has been sleeping on the job. In an Op-Ed piece in *The Jerusalem Post* Haley [writes](#), "For too long, the peacekeeping force has been utterly failing at achieving this fundamental part of its mandate... While UNIFIL has averted its eyes, Hezbollah has been preparing for war. By its own admission, Hezbollah is committed to the destruction of Israel. In recent times, it has doubled down on this commitment, massively increasing its supply of rockets, missiles and fighters." Instead of standing ready to actually fulfill their mandate, the soldiers of UNIFIL have just been standing. As we learn from the first word of our parashah, "standing" and "standing ready" represent two very different attitudes.

As Moses nears the end of his long address to the Jewish people he gathers the entire nation together and tells them, "You are standing here this day all of you...to enter into the covenant of the Lord..." (29:9-11) When we examine the Hebrew text, we notice immediately that Moses does not use the "standard" Hebrew word for "standing." In Hebrew, when we want to instruct someone to stand up we say *amod*, derived from the verb *la'amod*—"to stand." Moses does not say *atem omdim*. Rather, he tells them *atem netzavim*. What is the difference between the two? *Omdim* describes a physical posture. *Netzavim* describes not only a posture, but an attitude as well. In his first comment on the parashah Ramban writes, "That you stand ready before God to uphold the covenant..." *Netzav* means not only to stand, but "to position oneself." It is interesting to note that in biblical Hebrew *netzav* meant "military officer" (see I Kings 4:7), while today it's a major general in the Israeli police. The word *netzavim* connotes not only standing, but readiness to fulfill the mission and take the action necessary to uphold one's commitments.

To Ambassador Haley's great credit, through tough negotiations the UN expanded the UNIFIL mandate to bring a level of transparency to Hezbollah's military buildup throughout southern Lebanon. In the past, when UNIFIL soldiers got too close to Hezbollah positions, they would usually encounter a hastily constructed roadblock, and simply turn around having found no weapons, nor report the roadblock. The [new mandate](#) grants UNIFIL the authority to "take all necessary actions" to ensure that areas in which it is deployed are not used for "hostile activities of any kind. In addition, UNIFIL will, "conduct more patrols with Lebanese forces and report when peacekeepers run into roadblocks in Hezbollah strongholds in the country's south," the *Times of Israel* [reported](#). "This transparency will put an end to the ignorance about what's really going on in southern Lebanon," Haley explains. "When UNIFIL is prevented from doing its job, the Security Council will know about it. And if the UN refuses to act on this information, the world will know about it." Hopefully, this small but important change will also spur a shift in both the attitudes and actions of the UNIFIL force. Rather than permit them to simply stand in the region doing nothing, we must follow up on their actions and insist that they stand ready to take the necessary action to expose the incredible weapons stockpile that threatens Israel's northern region.

What about us? This coming week we will gather and stand together in prayer and also in our commitment not only to each other, but to the Jewish community around the world. Will we be *omdim*—simply standing? Or will we be *netzavim*—“standing ready”, prepared to do the necessary work to ensure the safety, security and well-being of Jews not only in our community, but especially in the state of Israel? ■

Time to Choose

And you shall choose life (Deuteronomy 29:19)

ובחרת בחיים (דברים כט:יט)

Last week, Israeli President Ruviv Rivlin traveled to Munich, Germany for the unveiling of the [Munich Massacre Memorial](#), honoring the memories of the eleven Israeli athletes and coaches and the German police officer murdered during the 1972 Olympic Games. In his speech at the unveiling ceremony, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier [noted that](#), “Until today, we carry a heavy burden regarding this catastrophe...In Germany, our way of life includes inseparably a commitment to our history, a commitment to the history of the Holocaust, the responsibility for Israel’s security that grows out of it, and the rejection of any form of anti-Semitism.” His words stand in stark contrast to the view of the Fatah party of the Palestinian Authority, who just last year, on the 44th anniversary of the massacre [published a Facebook post](#) lauding the “heroic Munich operation” which “demonstrates the meaning of the courage and power of the Palestinian resistance fighter...” The German people have chosen to repudiate their past, and are now a leading force for good in the world. The Palestinian leadership, however, continues to make the opposite choice, lauding, extolling and encouraging a culture of death.

The power of choice represents a primary theme throughout *Netzavim*, as Moses extols the nation to make the proper choices as the Jewish people take root in the Promised Land. He tells them, “See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil...” (30:15) “I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you may live, you and your seed.” (30:19) Our ability and obligation to make the right choices represents a fundamental aspect not only of Jewish ideology, but also of the High Holiday season. Maimonides writes, “Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his...This principle is a fundamental concept and a pillar [on which rests the totality] of the Torah and mitzvot as [Deuteronomy 30:15] states: ‘Behold, I have set before you today life [and good, death and evil].’” (*Laws of Repentance* 5:1-3)

The Palestinian leadership’s continued refusal to choose life and repudiate death manifests itself in myriad ways: It has chosen to publicly extol the perpetrators of murder, violence and terror, erecting monuments and naming streets and buildings after terrorists who killed and injured innocent civilians. It has chosen to promote violence through social media, prompting countless lone wolf attacks. Finally and most disturbingly, it has chosen to devote an inordinate portion of its budget to pay those terrorists and their families, both rewarding them for their heinous crimes as well as encouraging others to follow suit. It is time for the United States to compel the PA to make another critical choice.

In early August, the [Taylor Force Act](#) (S.1697) passed through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The legislation will eliminate assistance that directly benefits the PA unless it ends the abhorrent practice of paying salaries to terrorists and their families. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Ben Cardin (D-MD) said that the law will, “send an unambiguous signal to the Palestinian Authority that it must stop incentivizing terror.” Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-TN) added that, “This legislation will force the Palestinian Authority to make a choice: either face the consequences of stoking violence or end this detestable practice immediately.” We must [encourage our senators](#) to co-sponsor this critical bill to send a strong, forceful message to the Palestinian Authority. We will no longer tolerate the heinous choice of extolling death and murder over peace and coexistence. ■

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