



Sermon Tidbits

FEBRUARY 6, 2017

Parashat Beshalach

Armed for Self-Defense

And the children of Israel went up armed (Exodus 13:18)

וַחֲמוּשִׁים עָל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (שְׁמוֹת יג:יח)

Last week, the [New York Times reported that](#) Iran conducted yet another ballistic missile test in violation of the United Nations sanctions. While Iran claimed that its missile tests did not violate international sanctions, the Islamic State's motives seem clear: develop and perfect a ballistic missile program now so that it can arm those missiles as it sees fit once the nuclear agreement expires. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [addressed the Iranian missile threat](#) when he said that during his upcoming meeting with President Donald Trump in Washington he would, "Address the need to renew the sanctions against Iran...Sanctions against the ballistic missiles...and re-addressing the failed agreement on its nuclear capabilities."

While the international community must address the Iranian threat diplomatically, Israel, together with the United States, has worked for many years to prepare for the threat of long and medium range ballistic missiles. These efforts have included the development of two critical missile defense systems aimed at protecting the Jewish state from missile threats ranging from short to medium-range missiles to intercontinental ballistic missiles. As we read the story of the Exodus from Egypt and the splitting of the Reed Sea in Beshalach, we learn that when the Jewish people fled Egypt, God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was close, but God said: "Lest the people retreat when they see war, and they return to Egypt." (verse 17) Yet, in the very next verse we read that, "and the children of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt." (verse 18) If they traveled in a round-about manner to avoid military conflict, why then did they carry weapons? Ramban (on verse 18) explains that "Although they traveled in a roundabout route through the desert, they feared lest the Phillistines who dwelled in nearby cities attack them, so they armed themselves for war." In other words, they took the weapons not to attack other nations, but as defensive weapons for protection should they be attacked.

Commenting on the word *vachamushim*—"armed"—which is related to the word *chamesh*—"five"—Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, in his *Ba'al Haturim* commentary, explains that the Jewish nation armed themselves with five types of weapons: "a shield, a body shield, a spear, arrows and a hand-held stick." Today, bolstered by critical funding from the United States, the Jewish state has developed a comprehensive missile defense system borrowing from the very same terminology. Last month, Israel quietly activated the [Arrow 3 Missile defense system](#). The Arrow-3 system—researched, developed and funded through joint U.S.-Israel cooperation—is designed to shoot down intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) outside the earth's atmosphere, including nuclear, biological and chemical warheads. This powerful new defense shield is the most advanced element of Israel's multi-layered air defense array, which also includes Iron Dome short-range interceptors and the David's Sling system for medium-range missiles. In addition, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency (MDA) and Israel's Missile Defense Organization successfully conducted a fifth series of tests—including live interceptions of multiple targets—of the [David's Sling Weapon System](#) in Israel. Jointly developed by the U.S. defense company Raytheon and Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd., David's Sling can intercept short-range to medium-range rockets and ballistic missiles, including guided projectiles, cruise missiles, aircraft, and drones. When combined with the already operational Iron Dome system, the three systems offer the Jewish state a comprehensive protective shield against a broad range of airborne threats.

On his Facebook page, Netanyahu [shared a photo](#) of the recently tested Iranian ballistic missile which had the inscription (in Hebrew—just to ensure that Israelis got the message) “Israel must be destroyed,” to which he commented, “I will continue to tell the truth about Iran.” We must thank our elected officials for America’s support, which made the development of these systems possible, while we continue to encourage the United States to support ongoing funding for the critical missile-defense systems that can protect not only Israel, but any country in the world including the United States, from the dangerous threat of ballistic missiles. ■

Sharing in their Distress

They took a stone, and put it under him (Exodus 17:12)

ויקחו אבן וישמו תחתיו (שמות יז:יב)

According to [Reuters](#), “It happens nearly every night. After dark, the Syrian wounded come to known locations on the Israel-Syria front in the Golan Heights, driven by desperation to seek help from an enemy army. Israeli soldiers on lookout or patrol spot them waiting by the fence and whisk them away to a rear position where army medics soon arrive.” Captain Aviad Camisa, deputy chief medical officer of the Golan brigade said that, “We’re doing everything we can to save their lives, to stabilize them and evacuate them to hospital.” Why does Israel help the Syrians who consider Israel an enemy? On one hand, even small steps such as these can go a long way towards changing minds and hearts towards Israel among the Arab population. A Syrian recuperating at the Ziv medical center in Safed said that, “In the past we used to know Israel as our enemy. That’s what the regime used to tell us. When we came to Israel we changed our minds, there is no enmity between us.” But there’s a deeper, more fundamental reason why Israel helps the wounded Syrians: because they are in distress. And, as Moses teaches us, when someone is in distress, we cannot simply sit idly by. Rather, we must share in their distress and do our utmost to alleviate their suffering.

During the prolonged battle between the Israelites and Amalek, Moses realized that when he “held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.” (17:11) This realization required Moses to keep his arms aloft during the entire prolonged battle. We read that when he grew tired, “[Aaron and Hur] took a stone, and put it under him which he sat on; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.” (verse 12) Rashi (on verse 12) wonders: Why did they bring him a stone? Couldn’t they find a more comfortable seat like a chair or a cushion? According to Rashi, Moses asked specifically to sit on an uncomfortable stone. “[Moses] said, Israel is in a state of distress, so I too will be with them in distress.” The Sages in the Talmud viewed Moses’ actions as an example we must try to emulate. They taught that, “When the community is in trouble let not a man say, ‘I will go to my house and I will eat and drink and all will be well with me’...rather a man should share in the distress of the community, for so we find that Moses, our teacher, shared in the distress of the community... [From this we learn that] he who shares in the distress of the community will merit to behold its consolation.” (Taanit 11a)

This desire to share in the distress of others, and specifically the victims of the ongoing Syrian civil war, has also spurred Israel to make another significant humanitarian step. In addition to the over 2,500 Syrians that have been treated by Israel over the duration of the conflict, the [Jerusalem Post reported](#) that “Israel has agreed, for the first time, to grant asylum to some 100 children orphaned in Syria’s bloody civil war.” According to the plan, the children would spend their initial three months in dormitories, after which they will be integrated into Education Ministry institutions and also possibly taken in by foster and adoptive families. After four years of residency in the country, the children will become eligible for permanent residency status, authorizing their indefinite legal stay in Israel. Another organization called Amaliah “offers a number of humanitarian services for Syrians, including providing food, medical aid, drinking water and educational materials; coordinating visits to Israeli hospitals; holding women’s empowerment workshops; and pushing for an internationally backed safe zone in southern Syria. Yet another, called “Just Beyond the Border,” raised over \$350,000 in one month to bring much-needed emergency aid to the children of Syria. According to the [Times of Israel](#), “The campaign’s title reflects the ideology behind it: that Israelis simply cannot ignore the horrors taking place in neighboring Syria.” Moses would most certainly have agreed. ■

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