



Sermon Tidbits

JANUARY 22, 2017

Parashat Beshalach

Wrapping Oneself in the Cloak of Righteousness

It was reported to the King of Egypt (Exodus 14:5)

ויגד למלך מצרים (שמות יד:ה)

Late last month, a Lebanese-based organization that promotes BDS, failed to prevent Israeli artist Ariel Efraim Ashbel from performing in Berlin. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), after a series of Post exposés on the growing BDS movement in Berlin, the mayor of the city pledged to crackdown on boycott-Israel activity throughout the capital. Michael Muller, Berlin's Social Democratic mayor, said in September, that the BDS tactics of "standing with anti-Semitic signs in front of Berlin shops" are the functional equivalent of "the intolerable methods used in the Nazi era... We will do everything in our power to prevent the use of our venues and funds for BDS's anti-Israel incitements." While it is gratifying to see leaders in the German government rebuffing BDS efforts, the movement regularly wraps itself in attractive slogans such as "Freedom," "Justice" and "Equality" when criticizing Israel while in truth it is a movement that seeks to stigmatize, delegitimize, and isolate the state of Israel. BDS proponents seek to drive a wedge between Israel and the rest of the world—separating Israel's government, business, universities, and people from their partners abroad. By manipulating the language of international law, the BDS movement depicts Israel as an illegitimate aggressor, and seeks to sanction those who interact with the Jewish state.

Parshat Beshalach celebrates the remarkable miracle of the splitting of the Reed Sea, leading to the salvation of the Israelites. Prior to the redemption at the sea, for over two centuries the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. Physical attacks, the rape of women, and the murder of children were part and parcel of the daily assaults that the Israelites experienced in Egypt. Pharaoh inflicted unspeakable torture upon the lives of the Jews. Throughout the multiple interactions that Moses had with Pharaoh, Pharaoh never laid claim to being righteous. He asserted that he enslaved the Israelites simply because he could; he was strong and the Israelites were weak. However, Rashi explains that at the Reed Sea we find Pharaoh justifying his actions for chasing after the fleeing nation. Pharaoh had the audacity to claim that he had been under the impression that the Israelites were only leaving for a short period of time and that he had known otherwise, he never would have let them go. (see Rashi 14:5). By wrapping himself (and his nation) in a cloak of righteousness, the Egyptian monarch convinces his people to follow him after the Israelites into the desert, a tragic move that ultimately leads to their destruction.

The Pharaoh who stood at the sea and attempted to justify his ruthlessness against the Jewish nation was not the first nor will he be the last to employ unbalanced blame with the sole intent to condemn the our people. Today, enemies of the Jewish state attack Israel in the same way as they deliberately fail to present the objective facts. In actuality these groups are dedicated to demonizing Israel and its leaders. The actions of BDS are a modern day equivalent to the actions of the ruthless Pharaoh of old when he stood at the sea and justified his attempt to overtake the Israelites.

In recent days, Israel has been placed in the difficult position of trying to decipher between those groups who legitimately criticize Israel and those groups who crossover into promoting BDS. As Americans we need to make our voices heard and clearly articulate that we have no tolerance for organizations who intend to undermine and to harm Israel by engaging in BDS—especially when they veil themselves in false righteousness. We must take action by contacting members of Congress and urging them to cosponsor "The Israel Anti-Boycott Act" and the "Combating BDS Act of 2017."

Israel has long been targeted with economic warfare, and Congress has a proud history of defending the Jewish state from such attacks. We must do our part in ensuring that Israel and America continue to work hand in hand, in strong alliance, to combat those who seek to undermine the existence of Jewish people and our homeland. ■

On Guard

A war...from generation to generation (Exodus 17:16)

מלחמה...מדור לדור (שמות יז:טו)

Earlier this month, as he was driving on the highway near his home, Rabbi Raziell Shevach's car was sprayed with dozens of bullets by a passing car in an terrifying act of terror. As a volunteer emergency medical technician, Shevach sent a group message to his fellow medical workers that he had been shot and severely injured, a message which was later broadcast in the media. Although his friends rushed to treat him, he later succumbed to his wounds, leaving a wife and six children, the youngest eight months old. Sadly, Rabbi Shevach is not the first victim of terrorism directed at Jews. As we read in our parashah, Jews have been subject to devastating, murderous anti-Semitic attacks from the very moment of our birth as a nation.

Parashat Beshalach, which highlights the miraculous miracle of the splitting of the Reed Sea and the subsequent salvation of the Jewish people, also reports the vicious attack that followed on the heels of these wondrous events. The desert tribe of the Amalekites attacks the Jewish nation in the wilderness without warning or cause. The Torah commemorates this horrific attack with the instruction to always 'remember' this episode. One of the early biblical commentators, Rabbi Avraham Chadida in his commentary on *Megillat Esther*, asks how this mitzvah is relevant to us today. He answers that the Torah's term *zachor*—"remember" (Exodus 17:14) means that this mitzvah is not restricted to remembering but also has an active component: we must be ever-vigilant and on guard to the real danger of those who seek to inflict pain and intend to take the lives of innocent citizens of our nation. This mitzvah applies to every individual in every generation. Wherever a threat to the security of the Jewish people arises we must respond and defend ourselves immediately. We must not be dismissive and think that the threat will just 'go away'. Strikingly, the two concluding words in the portion of *Beshalach* emphatically state that the threat from Amalek exists *mi'dor dor*, "from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). The struggle against Amalek is continuous, and we must be on guard in every generation.

While Israel must do its part to capture the terrorists who committed this terrible act, we can do our part by asking our members of Congress to pressure the Palestinian Authority to remove the heinous financial incentives for terror. The bipartisan Taylor Force Act, named for U.S. Army veteran Taylor Force who was murdered by a Palestinian assailant in a March 2016 terrorist attack in Tel Aviv, would cut off funding for assistance that directly benefits the PA due to its ongoing practice of providing payments to convicted terrorists. This important legislation has already passed the House of Representatives and will soon be considered by the Senate.

Our *parsha* reminds us that we are mandated by the Torah to be vigilant when it comes to the welfare of Israel and endeavor to make the world a safer and more secure place for all people. It is our responsibility to contact our representatives and thank them for supporting this legislation in the House, as well as encouraging our Senators to support the Taylor Force Act and press the Palestinians to end the profane practice of paying terrorists and their families. ■

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