

JULY 30, 2018

Parashat Ekev

Loving Peace, Pursuing Peace

You will not lack anything in it (Deut. 8:9)

לא תחסר כל בה (דברים ח:ט)

Parashat Ekev continues Moses' farewell address to the Israelites. In doing so, Moses speaks of the beauty and virtues of the land of Israel. He describes Israel as "a land with brooks of water, fountains and depths that emerge in valleys and mountains. A land of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates." He continues, "you will not lack anything in it, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose mountains you will have copper." (Deut. 7:7-9) Yet despite Israel's natural resources and beautiful vegetation, Moses' words raise the question: is "not lack(ing) anything" an overstatement?

Perhaps Moses is not suggesting that we can obtain or purchase any item in the land. Rather, Moses blesses the Israelites with spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment that are strong enough to ensure we "will not lack anything." The Israelites' are to find happiness not by amassing material possessions, but through kindness, justice and peace. As Hillel famously says in *Pirkei Avot*, the Jewish people are to "be among the disciples of Aaron—a lover of peace, *ohev shalom*, and a pursuer of peace, *rodef shalom*." Following Moses' blessing, today, the Jewish people and the state of Israel also pursue kindness, justice and peace.

Each year, we set aside Tisha B'Av for mourning the tragedies of the Jewish people. This past Tisha B'Av, another misfortune was added to this day of tragedy. Hundreds of mourners in Israel attended the [funeral](#) of Staff Sgt. Aviv Levi, who was killed by Palestinian sniper fire on the Gaza border. Staff Sgt. Levi was close to Kibbutz Kissufim when he was shot in the chest in. Despite wearing body armor, Levi passed away shortly after he was hit.

The oldest of four siblings, Staff Sgt. Levi is the first IDF fatality on the Gaza front since Operation Protective Edge in 2014. In Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's words, Levi fought terror in Gaza "with determination and bravery, and to our great sorrow, sometimes this struggle bears a very high price." After Levi's death the IDF destroyed more than 60 Hamas targets, including three battalion headquarters. According to the IDF, "the attack delivered a severe blow to Hamas's training array, command and control abilities, weaponry, aerial defense and logistic capabilities." The loss of a precious young soldier on the Gaza border reaffirms Israel's need continue to pursue peace: to stand firm and protect her civilians.

Israel must unfortunately contend with terrorist activity that threatens innocent lives. As the situation in Gaza deteriorates, we, as Americans, must hold [Hamas](#)—a leadership that regularly calls for Israel's destruction and acts against Israel—responsible by supporting Israel's right to self-defense and by putting increased pressure on Hamas to end its campaign of violence. Just as Israel follows Moses' command to pursue kindness, justice and peace to "not lack anything" in the land of Israel, so too must we pressure Hamas to accept Israel's right to exist and a path towards lasting peace for all in the region. ■

Empathy and Affection

The Lord set his affection on your ancestors (Deut. 10:15)

רק באבותיך חשק ה' (דברים י:טו)

On July 23rd, Israel evacuated 800 members of the Syrian Civil Defense organization, also known as the [White Helmets](#). A response to American and Canadian calls to action, the rescue mission saved volunteers who would have otherwise faced detention or death at the hands of the Syrian regime. The IDF's released footage from the rescue operation shows buses of Syrian civilians being transferred through Israeli territory to Jordan. In the words of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the mission was “an important humanitarian step.” “The Israel Defense Forces deserve special commendation for this,” said [Jason Greenblatt](#), U.S. President Donald Trump's Special Representative for International Negotiations. He continued, “they managed to pull this operation together quickly and were focused on saving as many people as possible.”

Unlike the other books in the Torah, Deuteronomy is saturated with language of love and affection. Lord Rabbi Jonathan [Sacks](#) notes that the root of the Hebrew word for love, *ahv*, appears in the book of Exodus twice, in Leviticus twice, and not once in Numbers. However, in Deuteronomy it appears 23 times. *Parashat Ekev* features three significant examples. First, Chapter 7 proclaims, “the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you” (Deut. 7:12). Second, the *parasha* continues, “He will love you and bless you” (Deut. 7:13). And finally, further in the *parasha* we read, “the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them” (Deut. 10:15).

The following lesson emerges from the text: Not only does God bestow his love on us, but God behooves us to follow God's way of love and selflessness. This obligation is most clearly and famously articulated in the verse “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). God's love is to serve as a model for us in our humanity. We are charged to love the neighbor and the stranger, to engage in acts of kindness and compassion and to build a society based in love. Why does Deuteronomy particularly emphasize God's love? As Moses highlights the guiding principles of the Jewish people while they craft and construct their national identity in a new land, love is increasingly relevant. They are to build a society on empathy and mercy. These values laid the groundwork for the nation in its infancy and continue to guide Israel today.

When Israel sees her neighbors in Syria in peril, she responds with courage, empathy and love. Yet, that is but one example. By tragic circumstance, Israel is a world leader in handling mass casualties. Because of her experience coping with terror at home, Israel has developed extremely effective procedures for rapid responses to emergencies. In addition, Israel often donates needed food, medicine and supplies in emergency situations—something we as the American Jewish community can be immensely proud of. Within a decade of Israel's founding, she has demonstrated a deep commitment to humanitarian relief and international development programs. Today, Israel has extended international humanitarian assistance to more than 140 countries, including those who do not maintain diplomatic relations with the Jewish State.

Parashat Ekev's lessons of compassion and love remind us of the critical role kindness plays in Judaism and in the Jewish state. Whether it be extending a hand of empathy towards our adversaries through actions such as Israel's evacuation of the Syrian White Helmets or sharing our expertise in crisis intervention with the rest of the world, we model our actions on God's “covenant of love” with us. ■

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