

AUGUST 27, 2018

## Parashat Ki Tavo

### The Lesson of the First Fruits

**He has brought us to this place (Deut. 26:9)**

**ויבאנו אל המקום הזה (דברים כו:ט)**

Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, recently submitted a report that suggests sending UN rights monitors and observers to Gaza, and deploying a military or police force under a UN mandate. Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, [condemned these suggestions](#). Danon said that Arab civilians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank required shielding from their *own* leaders, rather than from Israel. According to Danon, "The Palestinian Authority incites its people to demonize and attack Jews, and Hamas, a terrorist organization, uses the people of Gaza as hostages and endangers the lives of civilians for terror's sake. Instead of delusional suggestions on how to protect the Palestinian people from Israel, the UN should hold the Palestinian leadership accountable for the harm caused to its own people."

*Parashat Ki Tavo* envisions a time when the Israelites are living in the land of Israel and experiencing the blessings of prosperity that they only dreamt of during their 40 years of wandering in the desert. The Torah tells us that when an Israelite farmer would bring his or her first fruits—*bikkurim*—to the Temple at harvest time, he or she would recite a standard declaration before the priest. This declaration, known in the Mishnah as *mikra bikkurim*, is familiar to many of us from the Passover Seder. Beginning with the phrase "My father was a fugitive Aramean," it briefly recounts the story of the Exodus: the pain and misery of slavery and the miracles and wonders that set the Israelites free. (Deuteronomy 26: 5-8) It is a narrative of struggle, ending with victory: "God brought us to this place and gave us this Land, a land flowing with milk and honey." (Deuteronomy 26:9) Why tell the story of the Exodus at the time of the bringing of the first fruits? It would be easy enough to just move ahead, celebrating the harvest as a human accomplishment. Yet, the retelling insists that the farmer take the time to express gratitude for the miracles of the past, while also recognizing the gifts of the present and laying a course for the future.

This beautiful message resonates today as we consider the short history of the state of Israel. In its 70 years of existence, Israel has experienced pain and suffering, but offered hope and promise in how far the Israeli people have come in a very short span of time. The Jewish state holds fast in its collective memory the determination and sacrifice of so many that gave their lives for the nation. Unfortunately, Israel is continually forced to defend itself from adversaries that seek to harm it. And, while Israel reluctantly uses military force to keep its citizens safe, it yearns for a future where peace can exist with all its neighbors.

In contrast, the people of Gaza, suffering under Hamas' rule, are subjected to a very different perspective from their government. Hamas blatantly violates international law by placing their terrorist infrastructure amongst civilian populations and hiding behind innocent civilians as they carry out armed attacks. During recent riots on the Israel-Gaza border, Hamas cynically exploited women and children as human shields in an effort to penetrate the border and carry out terrorist attacks. In addition, in the last month, terrorists in Gaza fired more than 200 rockets and mortars at Israel. Some rockets struck homes, schools and a synagogue. Thankfully, the Iron Dome missile defense system downed many others, saving Israelis lives and preventing Israeli military planners from having to embark upon a campaign inside of Gaza to prevent additional casualties.

Most egregious is, as Danon stated, that Hamas "uses the people of Gaza as hostages and endangers the lives of civilians for terror's sake." It is with this type of action in mind that Senators Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Joe Donnelly (D-IN) introduced the Sanction Terrorist Operations Using Human Shields Act of 2018—or the STOP Using Human Shields Act (S. 3257). This bipartisan bill mandates sanctions against members of foreign terrorist organizations responsible for the use of human shields.

The House unanimously passed (415-0) similar bipartisan legislation—the Hamas Human Shields Prevention Act (H.R. 3542)—on February 14. The Senate must now act on this important measure.

The United States and Israel have [made extensive efforts to address Gaza's humanitarian problems](#) and help Gaza's population. But U.S. and Israeli efforts cannot succeed while the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas obstruct the legitimate efforts to help the people of Gaza, and while Hamas continues to escalate its terrorism against Israelis. The United States must press the PA to support assistance for the people of Gaza and return to peace negotiations with Israel. The United States must also insist that Hamas commit to peace (meeting the so-called Quartet conditions), stop violence and terrorism, and ensure that all assistance is used to provide relief to the people of Gaza and not diverted for terrorist purposes. ■

## Innovation in Action

**You shall write it upon the stones (Deut. 27:8)**

**וכתבת על האבנים (דברים כז:ח)**

The Torah tells us that God commanded Moses to set up 12 large stones on the eastern side of the Jordan River, in the land of Moab, to serve as a monument for the Jewish people's covenant with God. The Torah was to be inscribed on these stones in 70 languages. This, according to Rashi, is the meaning of the phrase *be'er hatev*—for all to understand. Logistically, how does one write the entire Torah in 70 languages on 12 stones? The Ramban states that there was miraculous intervention to accomplish this task, and the Talmud tells us that plaster was spread over the writing to protect it from the rains and erasure, so that the words would be clear and lasting for all to read. From this story we see our obligation to share the Torah with the rest of the world, not as proselytizers but as a way to seek the betterment of all mankind. It is in this same vein that the sages included the phrase in the Aleinu prayer, "*letaken olam b'mlchut Shadai*." In other words, a further condition for fulfilling our role is that we must share the lessons of the Torah with the entire world.

A remarkable example of Israeli innovation has recently been reported in the media and celebrated in Israel. PepsiCo officially announced plans to acquire the Israeli based carbonated drink-maker, SodaStream, for \$3.2 billion. One of the unique features of this product is that it offers a more ecologically friendly way to procure soda products without the waste of plastic bottles that are thrown away. Indra Nooyi, PepsiCo chairman and CEO, called the companies an "inspired match" since both companies aim to reduce waste and limit their environmental footprint. Israel's Minister of Economy and Industry, Eli Cohen, welcomed the sale of SodaStream: "The promotion of industry and employment, as SodaStream and its CEO have been doing for years, is a national mission to be implemented in the southern periphery." When Cohen spoke with SodaStream's CEO Daniel Birnbaum and congratulated him on the deal, the latter reiterated the company's commitment to Israel and the fact that this commitment is part of the agreement.

This is not the first time that SodaStream is in the news. The company became the target of the boycott, sanctions and divestment (BDS) movement in 2014. Ironically, PepsiCo participated in the Arab League boycott of Israel until 1992. As [Tablet](#) stated, "Now, 26 years after its own experiment with economic censure failed spectacularly, Pepsi delivered another blow to advocates of boycotting Israel by paying a mint for one of the companies said boycotters revile the most. We've come full circle, another useful reminder that ingenuity and industriousness will always triumph..."

When the state of Israel brings its ingenuity and knowhow to the world it is fulfilling the sacred task first given to the nation of Israel when they embarked on settling the land 3,000 years ago. Israel today, the 150<sup>th</sup> smallest country in the world, with virtually no natural resources and surrounded by hostile nations, nevertheless has become a world leader in science [innovation](#) and technology.

This unique quest for innovation and creativity is another area that contributes to the strong bond between Israel and the United States. Both countries share a culture of innovation. American heavy weights such as Intel, Motorola, and Google have capitalized on Israel's entrepreneurial spirit and world-class talent pool, and now PepsiCo joins the list. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin [Netanyahu](#) praised the acquisition of SodaStream by PepsiCo, stating, "The recent major acquisitions of Israeli companies prove not only the technological capabilities that have been developed in Israel, but the business capabilities as well. I welcome this huge deal that will enrich the state treasury and also the important decision to keep the company in Israel." As Israel continues to make the world a better place, let us all take pride in its achievements, and satisfaction in the close relationship between the United States and Israel. ■

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