

JUNE 18, 2018

Parashat Chukat

Missing Miriam

..and Miriam died there (Numbers 20:1)

ותמת שם מרים (במדבר כ:א)

When it comes to treatment of Israel in international bodies, the United States plays a critical role in defense of the Jewish state. We saw this most starkly on May 18, when the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) voted on a resolution to establish an investigation into Israel's defensive actions against Hamas-initiated riots at Israel-Gaza border. Only the United States and Australia voted against the resolution. Following the vote, U.S. Representative to the UNHRC Theodore Allegra criticized the measure and the Council, stating, "This is yet one more example of the Human Rights Council's biased focus on Israel. The continued insistence of this body to focus more attention on Israel than on any other member state calls into question the credibility of this body." Allegra added, "The resolution's one-sided," "without any call for investigation of Hamas," and "wrong."

Two weeks later, the [United States](#) again demonstrated its friendship with Israel, calling for an emergency United Nations Security Council meeting to condemn the recent Hamas rocket and mortar attacks against Israel from Gaza which hit civilian infrastructure and a kindergarten. "The Security Council should be outraged and respond to this latest bout of violence directed at innocent Israeli civilians; and the Palestinian leadership needs to be held accountable for what they're allowing to happen in Gaza," said U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley. It's clear that the United States' defense of Israel is crucial to ensuring unbiased action in these international bodies, proving the strength of a friendship we cannot take for granted, especially in consideration of this week's *parasha*.

As the Israelites arrive in Kadesh in *Parashat Chukat*, God instructs Moses and Aaron to take a staff and speak to the rock enabling water to emerge from it. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses strikes the rock, costing Moses and Aaron their chance of leading the people into the Promised Land. But why did he fail at this particular test? After all Moses had been in similar situations twice before and each time dealt with it appropriately. [Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks](#) suggests a unique interpretation, focusing on the context of Miriam's passing not long before this *parasha*. He argues that one must take note of the context; namely, that Miriam, had just passed away. Thus, this is the first challenge Moses faces without Miriam's support and guidance, leaving him vulnerable and without emotional control. As secure and confident as Moses was in his role as leader, bereft of his close confidant at his side, Moses stumbles and falters with grave consequences for himself, Aaron, and the future of the Jewish people.

Just as Miriam stood ably by as Moses' close confidant and supporter, so to today, does the United States serve as Israel's closest ally. Although the state of Israel is a formidable and confident nation, it remains critically important that she has her closest allies at her side, especially when facing dangerous foes and adversaries as we've seen in the past month alone. We in the pro-Israel community must continue to express our gratitude to our U.S. government leadership for their staunch support of Israel. The Jewish state remains America's most reliable [strategic partner](#) in the Middle East, working to defeat common threats and supporting America's regional and global objectives and the United States remains her closest friend. ■

Toppling A Giant

I have delivered him into your hand (Numbers 21:34)

בידך נתתי אתו (במדבר כא:לד)

This Shabbat we read *Parashat Chukat*, in which the conquest of the Promised Land begins. After almost 40 years of wandering in the desert, the people of Israel with Moses's leadership begin fulfilling the divine promise by conquering the eastern part of the land of Israel. After defeating Sichon, king of the Emorites, the people of Israel are faced with a new threat: Og, king of Bashan, who deploys his army against the nascent Jewish people. In a fanciful presentation, the sages of the Midrash teach that Og picked up a mountain the size of the encampment of Israel and threatened Moses with it. Upon Moses and the Israelites prayers, small bugs then devoured the mountain from the inside, forcing its deterioration and crumbling it on top of Og, trapping the giant and allowing Moses to eliminate Og with one precise hit to his ankle. Looking past the fancy of the story, we see that Og was beaten not by military force but with spiritual force: the prayer of Israel that Og's might (the mountain) be destroyed from within. Thus, we learn that no matter the strength of the Israelite's army, its victory is dependent on adherence to higher spiritual, and, in turn, moral standards. In the words of the prophet; "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, said the Lord of hosts" (*Zechariah* 4:6), a lesson that brings us to thinking today of Israel's defense and strength against adversary.

On June 10, the Israeli military bombed a previously unknown variety of Hamas tunnel in the Gaza Strip that extended out into the sea. The military believes that the tunnel was meant to allow frogmen from Hamas' elite naval unit to travel undetected underground from their base into the sea and then to their Israeli targets. IDF spokesperson Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus said that it was a "possibility" that Hamas has more such tunnels. "We continue to monitor the area using all of the operational, technological and intelligence capabilities at our disposal." To combat these and other threats, on May 27, the Israeli Defense Ministry announced that work had begun on a [naval wall](#), described by the ministry as an "impregnable breakwater," which will extend some 660 feet out to the sea and serve as an additional hurdle for Hamas frogmen seeking to infiltrate into Israel. As the Israeli military deepens its understanding of Hamas' military capabilities, we are reminded once again of Israel's critical need to protect over six million Israelis (Jews and Arabs alike) who are within range of the estimated 10,000 [Hamas](#) rockets.

The citizens of Israel, like citizens of any country, deserve to live safely and securely. While the IDF has spent considerable efforts to address the threat of the "terror tunnels" and protect its citizens, technological barriers to success remain. As we take lessons from this week's parasha and ask how Israel can defend herself with true moral conviction just as the Israelites defended against Og, we recognize that U.S. security assistance to Israel is vital in helping Israel confront this key challenge via technological advancement. In May 2017, Congress appropriated \$42.5 million to support joint research, development and test activities between the United States and Israel to better detect and destroy these tunnels and to help both nations defend against future threats. We are confident that continued friendship between the U.S. and Israel will allow Israel to continue her path of moral defense of her citizens. Standing shoulder to shoulder, the Jewish homeland will be secure, able to chart a new path that will lead to peace in Israel and throughout the region and following the generational defense of the Jewish nation. ■

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