

AUGUST 13, 2018

Parashat Shoftim

By Land and By Sea

Justice, justice you shall pursue (Deut. 16:20)

צדק צדק תרדף (דברים טז:כ)

On the evening of August 8, Hamas fired over 200 rockets and mortars into Israel, injuring at least 23 Israelis. The situation between Gaza and Israel continues to deteriorate. Once again, Israel is forced to find the most effective ways to defend herself and her citizens from Hamas and terrorist activity.

The Israeli Defense Ministry recently revealed images of a [sea barrier](#) being constructed to protect the southern area of the country from attacks from the Gaza Strip. Defense Minister of Israel Avigdor Liberman said, “Israel’s counter-terrorism capabilities around Gaza are increasing every day...our ability to prevent attacks near the Strip gets better all the time.” The decision to build the barrier was prompted by an attack carried out during Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014, in which four Hamas naval commandos swam ashore outside Kibbutz Zikim on Israel’s southern coast. The work on the 37-mile barrier began in 2016 and is expected to be finished by the end of next year. The barrier’s advanced underground protection system extends dozens of meters below the sea to destroy tunnels penetrating into Israeli territory, aiming to protect Israel from all fronts.

Parashat Shoftim begins by addressing the Israelite’s need to establish a justice system. As the children of Israel stand at the doorstep of their new homeland, Moses turns to defining the underpinnings of a just and moral society. Most famous in this set of commandments is the following verse: “Justice, justice shall you pursue, so that you may live, and inherit the land which the Lord your God gives you.” Nachmanides offers a unique interpretation of the repetition of the word “justice.” He explains that one “justice” refers to earthly courts while the other refers to the heavenly tribunal. That is, failure to achieve a just world is met with judgment from above. Perhaps more profoundly, Nachmanides’ idea suggests that man is partner with the Divine in pursuing what is moral and good. The Torah summons us to pursue justice and equity and repair the world around us, yet it shows us that we engage in this sacred task with a helping hand from above.

In a period of grave escalation of threats, the state of Israel walks in the path of our biblical ancestors in pursuit of building a just and righteous society. The leadership and people of Israel yearn for the day when they will live in peace and harmony with their neighbors. In pursuing peace, Israel must do all that is necessary to ensure the safety and security of her citizens—for this too is a moral responsibility of Israel. While [Hamas](#) calls for the conquering of and violence against Israel, Israel unfortunately remains laser focused in defending herself from Hamas.

But Israel cannot pursue justice alone. The state relies on the United States government adopting strong measures supporting Israel’s right to self-defense, and funding the Iron Dome missile defense systems. As the Jewish community—particularly in this time of turmoil—our pursuit of “justice” as commanded in this week’s *parasha* must include defending Israel’s right to protect her citizens. Together, we aim to serve as a beacon of light to the world in the pursuit of liberty and justice, standing strong in the face of adversaries who seek to diminish our precious values. ■

The King's Personal Torah

And it shall be with him...all days of his life (Deut. 17:19)

והיתה עמו...כל ימי חייו (דברים יז:יט)

On August 7, the United States reinstated the first set of sanctions on Iran since pulling from the JCPOA in May. The sanctions target Iran's automotive sector as well as gold and other metals. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo explained that the sanctions are "an important part of our efforts to push back against Iranian malign activity." The renewed [sanctions](#) are part of the broader strategy of this administration aimed at bringing the Iranians back to the negotiating table. According to a senior U.S. administration [official](#), U.S. President Trump "will meet with the Iranian leadership at any time to discuss a real comprehensive deal that will contain their regional ambitions, will end their malign behavior and deny them any path to a nuclear weapon."

This week's *parasha* commands the kings to write and carry their own Torah scroll. The commentators focus particularly on the verse, "it [the Torah] shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life" (Deut. 17:19). Rashi interprets this phrase quite literally. He explains that the Torah was intended to always physically be with the king to serve as the king's spiritual compass and remind him of his bearings and sacred mission. In contrast, Nachmanides comments that the king is commanded to internalize the lessons of the Torah. That is, the lessons of the Torah should remain with him for "all the days of his life."

Rabbi Moshe Sofer's interpretation brings together both the literal and figurative meaning of the Torah. He explains that the Torah needed to always be in the possession of the king for the purpose of making difficult decisions throughout his reign. The Torah should serve as a guide to consult and read in times of need. To make the appropriate decisions that steer the nation away from danger and towards liberty and freedom, the nation's leader must be solidly rooted in the ethics and morality of the Torah. This idea of never losing sight of our guiding principles was so important that a king would literally never take a step without the Torah in hand.

While it seems that the threat of Iran is unceasing, we too must learn from the message of the king's personal Torah and stay steadfast in the pursuit of peace. Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, remains the greatest long-term threat to American and Israeli interests in the Middle East. Iran seeks to spread its ideology abroad by supporting terrorist proxy groups, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In Syria, Iran continues to provide arms, funding and personnel to the brutal Assad regime that repeatedly has used chemical weapons against its own citizens. And—since 2015—Iran has conducted at least 20 illicit ballistic missile tests in defiance of U.N. prohibitions and dramatically increased military spending.

Following the commandment of the kings to stay true to one's guiding principles for "all days of his life," it is crucial that we in the Jewish community confront Iran's aggression and support efforts to ensure that Iran can never acquire a nuclear weapon capability. Thus, we must also urge our members of Congress to work towards a bipartisan, comprehensive strategy, that pushes back against the regime's regional [aggression](#) and supports increased sanctions on the Iranian government. The message of the king's personal Torah rings true today in setting policies and strategies that guide our nation. We are bidden by this ancient tradition to remain steadfast and determined in our efforts, so that we ensure freedom and liberty for our country and beyond. ■

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