

SEPTEMBER 12, 2018

## Parashat Vayelech

### The Legacy of Senator John McCain

And Moses went (Deut. 31:1)

וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה (ל:א)

U.S. Senator [John McCain](#) of Arizona, a former prisoner of war in Vietnam, passed away at age 81 after a battle with brain cancer. He had served the United States of America faithfully for sixty years and was a steadfast supporter of the U.S.-Israel relationship. He supported Israel's military action in Gaza against Hamas in 2014, aggressively opposed the nuclear deal brokered between six world powers and Iran in 2015 and passionately criticized the Obama administration's decision not to veto a UN Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlement activity in 2016.

Reflecting on McCain's passing, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated, "I am deeply saddened by the passing of John McCain, a great American patriot and a great supporter of Israel. I will always treasure the constant friendship he showed to the people of Israel and to me personally. His support for Israel never wavered. It sprang from his belief in democracy and freedom. The State of Israel salutes John McCain."

As Moses' leadership of Israel is about to end. God has decided it is the time for Joshua to lead. As in the life of almost all humans, Moses leaves the world with some regrets and unrealized hopes. He will not lead the people of Israel into the Land of Israel and he himself will not be buried there. His two sons will not succeed him in leadership and special prominence. And, he has seen into the dark tunnel of future Jewish history and is therefore acutely aware of the tragedies, difficulties, struggles and challenges that will face his beloved people and their descendants throughout the coming ages. Yet he is comforted by the fact that his beloved Joshua will take his place, bring the Israelites into their homeland, and guide them in settling it. He is also comforted by the promise of God that Israel will survive all of the vicissitudes of its history and eventually be redeemed and strengthened physically and spiritually. The Midrash has Moses attended to in his final hours by God Himself, so to speak. Thus, death itself does not overwhelm him; only the sadness of leaving a world where so much can be accomplished for a world that is eternal but poses no further challenge.

The title word of the parasha, *vayelech*, Moses "went" is interesting. Where was Moses going? The Midrash provides insight into the word *vayelech*. It states that Moses went from tribe to tribe, from tent to tent of the families of Israel to take leave of them. He showed them that his love for them knew no bounds and that even though he had high expectations for his people and at times rebuked their behavior, everything that he did in his forty-year stewardship of Israel was done with Divine blessing and enormous care and love. Although Moses would soon leave this world, his influence and teachings will remain with Israel and in fact all of humanity on a continuing and eternal basis.

We in the Jewish community are indebted to Senator McCain and feel a sense of great loss for a person who was a close and trusted friend to the state of Israel and who, throughout his political career, stood up in her defense. The pro-Israel community throughout this country is hopeful that Senator McCain's legacy will continue to live on. We are confident that this U.S. administration and future administrations will be inspired by the principles that were dear to him. We are sure that the unbreakable bond between the U.S. and Israel will continue to be a lasting bond so that together as partners we can boldly and courageously pursue the ideals of liberty and justice for all mankind. ■

## How To Make Amends

**You should return to the Lord your God (Deut. 30:2)**

**ושבת עד ה' אלקיך (דברים ל:ב)**

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The [Trump administration](#) has decided to cut more than \$200 million in aid to the Palestinians. The move is the ostensible result of a review of U.S. assistance to the Palestinian Authority that President Trump ordered in January, following Palestinian outrage over his decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the U.S. embassy there. "As a result of that review, at the direction of the President, we will redirect more than \$200 million ... in Economic Support Funds originally planned for programs in the West Bank and Gaza," a State Department official said. "Those funds will now address high-priority projects elsewhere." This is not the first time President Trump has cut long-standing aid bound to the Palestinians. In January, the White House announced it also would withhold \$65 million in assistance to the U.N. relief agency for Palestinians. Earlier this month, the administration released millions of dollars in frozen aid to the PA, but only for Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation, an administration source said.

Washington's withdrawal of the aid comes as Trump's team tasked with brokering an Israeli-Palestinian accord is expected to release its long-awaited peace plan. Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner and special envoy for Middle East peace Jason Greenblatt are expected to roll out the proposal in the near future, though they have provided no timetable for when that might happen. The Palestinians immediately castigated the recent move. PLO Executive Committee member [Dr. Hanan Ashrawi](#) said the Trump administration "has already demonstrated meanness of spirit in its collusion with the Israeli occupation and its theft of land and resources; now it is exercising economic meanness by punishing the Palestinian victims of this occupation."

Early rabbinic authorities that enumerated the 613 commandments of the Torah disagree regarding the source for the mitzvah of *repentance*. Some suggest that the original source is to be found in a verse that appears towards the end of the Torah. "You shall return to the Lord your God" (Deut. 30:2). Other rabbinic authorities understand this verse as a promise about the future rather than a commandment. Regardless of whether the verse is a commandment or a promise, the idea of *teshuvah* permeates the closing portions of the Torah. The *Mishnah* at the end of *Tractate Yoma* (83b) says that Yom Kippur atones only for the transgressions between man and God. However, if a person sins against his friend, Yom Kippur does not atone. Rather, he must make amends to the person he wronged. There is a well-known custom that on the eve of Yom Kippur a person is to appease others who possibly bear a grudge or feel that they have been wronged. The cleansing power of the day of Yom Kippur itself cannot be achieved by fasting and prayer alone. In truth, these components of Yom Kippur have little relevance in relation to the wrongs committed against our fellow man. The only effective method of *teshuvah*, repentance, in this area is by asking our fellow person for forgiveness and sincerely engaging in rectifying the relationship and moving forward.

Judaism believes in the power of change—the ability to for a person or group of people to embark on a new path and change behavior. Mistakes committed in the past can be rectified. This is a remarkable idea that saturates these sacred days. Our sages teach that the first step in the process of change is recognition of our faults and shortcomings. Only then can the process of rectification begin.

In the spirit of this teaching we might consider the situation in the Middle East and optimistically hope for a brighter day ahead. We believe that all people can change. At this time, the U.S. and Israel wish to convey a message to the Palestinian people that an internal and honest assessment needs to be made on their part. This requires recognition of faults and an honest appraisal of what needs to be corrected. Abuse of U.S funds, U.S. taxpayer dollars, will not be tolerated. The key question that must be asked is how to break this cycle of abuse and how to pursue a path that will lead to a lasting peace. As AIPAC CEO [Howard Kohr](#), noted in his March Policy Conference address, "peace begins with talking." He added, "It has been nearly eight years since President Abbas has had direct talks with an Israeli prime minister." Kohr further expanded that Israel's emerging relationship with a number of Arab countries was "a force for moderation" and "a message to the Palestinian leadership that a bright future is possible when you finally put aside generations of hatred and choose to live side by side in peace with the Jewish state of Israel."

We hope and pray that the coming year brings opportunities for reconciliation and a renewed dialogue and effort, on all sides, to work towards understanding and tolerance so that all people can live together in security, happiness and peace. ■

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