



Parashat Chukat 5772 - #239

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On the Haftarah... Brilliant Statesmanship

[Ashekenazim/Sefardim: Shoftim 11:1-33
Yemenite Jews: 11:1-40]

Did our politicians read chapter 11 of the Book of Shoftim, which describes the peace process between Yitach and the Amonites?

"Yitach of Gilad was a valiant warrior" (Shoftim 11:1). The elders of Gilad turned to him when the Nation was mired in distress. The Amonites attacked us and we had no leader. The Nation of Israel therefore turned to Yiftach, who was not an official leader; on the contrary, he was unjustifiably pushed to the edge of society following feelings of jealousy and the coveting of inheritance (ibid. 11:3). But he was a great warrior and the Nation made him their leader (ibid. v. 11).

What was his first act? "Yiftach sent messengers to the king of the Amonites saying: What is between you and me that you have come to wage war in my Land?" (ibid. v. 12). Although he was a brazen warrior, he was not rash to start a war. He knew his Land and preferred to open negotiations - a peace process. Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, the great Torah commentator who was also a well-regarded statesman, first in Portugal and then in Spain, praises Yiftach's attempt at offering peace first.

What was the king's response? "Because Israel took my land when it ascended from Egypt, from Arnon to the Yabok until the Jordan, so now return them [the lands] in peace" (ibid. v. 13). He essentially said: this is only a territorial disagreement. He had no intention to begin a war for war's sake. He just wanted Israel to return the land we took from him.

It thus seemed that there was no chance for negotiations. But Yiftach did not think that all was lost. He sent a new delegation. The Abarbanel precisely analyzed his strategy and words, and identified four main parts:

1. Yiftach reconstructed the facts: There was no war against you (the Amonites) during that period, but against Sichon, who had conquered your territory. We, in turn, captured the

territory from Sichon. Therefore, you cannot make such a claim against us, but against him. Our Land was under his control at that time (ibid. v. 19).

2. We were not the ones who attacked Sichon - he attacked us, at a time that we desired peace. Long before then, we asked permission from the king of Amon to pass through his land to arrive to our destination. Because of his refusal, we were forced to take a lengthy, indirect route. The same thing happened with Moav. When we sent the same message to Sichon, he not only refused to let us pass through his land, he assembled his army and waged war against us. We were forced to protect ourselves. We were victorious, and we took control of the Land. This victory, the result of a defensive war, was completely legitimate. When a nation attacks another and loses territory as a result, it is immoral to demand its return. The risk of not regaining lost territory has the ability to stop political attacks (ibid. v. 15-22).
3. Moshe Rabbenu's war against King Sichon began on account of Divine will. Their dispute was not only against the Nation of Israel but against the presence of Hashem Himself. The Master of the Universe is the One who gave us this Land. If you have problems with our G-d, turn to your own: "Will you not take what your god Chemosh gives you? Likewise, whatever Hashem our G-d has given us, we will possess" (ibid. v. 24). It appears that your "god" Chemosh did not help you when Sichon conquered your land. There is therefore no benefit in hoping to be victorious over us or defeating our G-d. Your motives are not political but an attempt at opposing the will of our G-d.
4. Over the course of three hundred years, from the conquest of Moshe Rabbenu until that point, this Land was not in your hands. During this entire period, we dwelt in its cities and you did not say a word. Why didn't you take them in return? Why are you only starting up now? (ibid. v. 26).

As we see, Yiftach had many claims: historical, ethical, and religious, and those which stem from true intellect. But none of them were accepted by the King of Amon: "And the king of Amon did not listen to the words of Yiftach, which he sent" (ibid. v. 28).

The Amonites were therefore determined to go to war. This created an opportunity for Yiftach to prove that he was not only a brilliant statesman but a brilliant military strategist as well. He decided not to run a defensive war on our territory, but to plan an attack on enemy territory: "Then Yiftach went out to wage war against the Amonites, and Hashem gave them into his hands. He struck twenty towns with a great blow from Aro'er to the vicinity of Minit, as far as Avel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Amon" (ibid. v. 32-33). It is always preferable to wage war on the enemy's territory. Yiftach's plan was successful, and the Amonites were convinced not to deal with us, which allowed us to reside in peace for many years.

We can only suggest to our statesman, who negotiate for peace with our enemies, that they prepare by learning the precedents, for as you know: "Many prophets stood for Israel, double those who left Egypt, but only a prophecy which was needed for all generations was written, one which was not needed for generations was not written" (Megillah 14a).

Rav Aviner on...

The Ends Do Not Justify the Means

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Korach 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: Must the Mitzvot of the Torah be fulfilled at any price? Even at the cost of committing sins along the way?

Answer: The Master of the Universe does not desire that we perform Mitzvot if to do so we must commit wrongful deeds. If it is impossible for us to perform a Mitzvah without first performing a sin, G-d foregoes that Mitzvah.

Fortunate is he who performs the Mitzvah of Lulav, but not with a stolen Lulav. "For I am Hashem who loves justice and hates burnt offerings involving theft" (Yeshayahu 61:8). Our Sages comment, "Even for the sake of bringing G-d a burnt offering one must not steal" (Sukkah

30). The Talmud there adds: "A mortal king was once passing by the tax offices. He said to his servants, 'Give this money to the tax collectors,' and they replied, 'Surely all the tax money is yours.' The king then said, 'From me all passersby will learn not to evade taxes.' G-d likewise said, 'I am Hashem who hates burnt offerings involving theft.' My children will learn from Me and they will make themselves flee from theft."

Even for a Mitzvah performed for the Supreme King of Kings one must not steal -- neither in order to construct Shuls and study houses, nor to support Yeshivot and Jewish day schools. If we maintain such standards, then everyone will learn to view as obvious the fact that one must not steal for any other reason.

The Jerusalem Talmud contains a still sharper parable: "A person brought a gift to the king, yet it became clear to the king that the gift was an object that had been stolen from the king himself. Woe to the one whose defender became his accuser!" (Jerusalem Talmud, Sukkah, Ch. 3). Not only is a good deed that is achieved through a sin not a good deed, but it is itself transformed into a sin.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato stresses that when an employee does Mitzvot on his work time, that is likewise considered theft and it is not acceptable before G-d: "Even if someone performed a Mitzvah during his work time, it will not be attributed to him as a righteous act, but as a sin, for no sin can be a Mitzvah. Scripture states, 'I am Hashem who hates burnt offerings involving theft.' In the same regard our Sages said: If someone stole a bushel of wheat, ground it up and baked bread, and he recited a blessing over it, he is not blessing G-d but cursing Him, as it says, 'When the greedy wretch blesses G-d, he curses Him' (Tehilim 10:3. Baba Kamma 94).

Of such instances it is said, 'Woe to this person whose defender has become his accuser.' Moreover, we have our Sages' ruling regarding use of a stolen Lulav. What I said about doing Mitzvot on work time makes sense. After all, if stealing an object is considered theft, then stealing time is as well. Just as when one steals an object and performs a Mitzvah, his defender becomes his accuser, so too, when one steals time and uses it to perform a Mitzvah, his defender becomes his accuser. G-d desires nothing more than trustworthiness" (Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 11).

Whenever we are about to eat bread, or pray, we must wash our hands ritually. In the same way, before any act of holiness we must make certain that our hands are clean. Maran Ha-Rav Kook writes: "A person must always make sure that his goals are pure and holy, and that his means of achieving those goals are pure and holy as well" (Olat Re'eiya 2, 257).

He further writes: "There are good and holy entities in the world whose foundations of support are unseemly. For example, weakness, falsehood and wickedness can sometimes lend support to such fine principles as shyness, modesty and faith. Yet, just as favors performed by the wicked for the righteous only harm the righteous (Yevamot 103), so too, goodness bolstered by evil and impurity is actually profaned greatly by them.

The light of Redemption cannot be actualized until all the evil foundations are destroyed, even those that support goodness and holiness.

And even though, as a result, goodness, holiness and faith suffer, and they decline and seem to become impoverished, this descent and impoverishment really represent ascent and revitalization. This is because after these evil foundations decay, light and luster and holiness will immediately begin to spring forth upon healthy foundations of knowledge, wisdom, courage, splendor, eternity and majesty.

It is by such means that an everlasting kingdom illuminated by G-d's goodness and light will be established in the End of Days. This will be the fulfillment of G-d's faithful and everlasting covenant with David -- never to be annulled: 'For He said: Surely they are My

people, children who will not lie. So He was their deliverer. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them. In His love and in His pity He redeemed them, and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old” (Orot, Orot Ha-Techiyah, 52).

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Kever Yosef

Q: Should one try to visit Kever Yosef?

A: Certainly. It is Eretz Yisrael. But only with the permission of Tzahal (Chief Rabbis of Israel. Kum Hithalech Ba-Aretz pp. 244-245).

Q: Is Tzahal required to save Jews who sneak into Kever Yosef without permission? After all, they endanger themselves and Tzahal.

A: Yes. One should have mercy on our confused brothers.

Q: Based on Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah #364, should we re-inter the bones of Yosef from Shechem out of a fear that the non-Jews will desecrate his grave?

A: We must have strength and courage and not fear.

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