

CyberTorah: God Who Makes Peace for Israel

Prime Minister of Israel strikes me as among the worst jobs in the world right now. Ehud Olmert's popularity ratings are as low as they are in part because it's a job with many deep lasting problems and few if any good solutions. Any move that actually changes the status quo in any direction is deeply unpopular with a large segment of Israeli society because the country is so divided over what to do. And worst of all, the Palestinians leadership appears willing to completely destroy their own society as long as they take Israel with them.

Olmert faces many problems. Among them, the almost daily violence directed at the city of Sderot. Sderot is a border town of Israel next to the Gaza Strip. It is inside the green line, meaning inside the pre-1967 borders of Israel. Despite that integral status, terrorists attack the city almost daily. The residents of Sderot feel somewhat forgotten, but those committed to violence are helping the rest of Israel remember them.

Last week, for the first time, missiles were fired at Ashkelon in a sustained way. Ashkelon is 36 miles south of Tel Aviv, so this attack demonstrates a new capacity and level of threat from those terrorists sitting inside the Gaza Strip. Among the missiles were three Iranian Grad missiles that have significant range. Suddenly Israelis are reminded that the ability to hit Sderot with impunity means that all of Israel is potentially at risk.

So what is a Prime Minister to do? Olmert chose to send in IDF forces to destroy the material used, to kill those attacking Israel, and to clear a larger buffer between Gaza and Israel proper. It was good for his popularity ratings, but hardly a long term solution. Qassam rockets continue to fall in Sderot, Israel threatens more incursions. To me, it looks like a stalemate, with both Israelis and Palestinians slowly bleeding to death.

The extremists in Gaza and the West Bank have every reason to continue their violence. They want to destroy Israel. Allowing Peace talks to happen smoothly derails their agenda. Should Palestinians ever realize the marvelous nation they could build provided they make a lasting peace with Israel, those extremists would find themselves marginalized, ignored, and arrested. May such a day come soon and speedily.

By contrast, as long as the IDF keeps trying to take out well hidden terrorists, with the resultant damage to property and loss of innocent lives, their hands are strengthened. The extremists look like saviors, the only ones willing to strike out against the enemy. Never mind that they have no reasons for striking schools in Sderot or beaches and factories in Ashkelon. That no objective exists to be fulfilled. At least they are striking these soldiers who come violently into their homes and villages.

I am a lover of peace and of Israel. I am a person who believes in the power of prayer. Though I have no good policy suggestions, I do have prayer. Jewish prayer has always connected us to the land of Israel. Heartfelt prayer has the power to inspire and change. It identifies our aspirations and so creates hope amid despair. Peace is possible only when people hope.

May it be Your will, O Lord our God, that soon and speedily we will see peace in the Land of Israel. Let it be a peace in which residents of Sderot and Ashkelon can go to school or work secure and safe. Similarly, may it be Your will to incline the hearts of the Palestinian people and the Arab world generally to see the benefits of peace. May they discover the courage to make the hard choices and real sacrifices needed to build their own free society that benefits from a close peaceful partnership with Israel. May the leaders of Israel be granted the wisdom to act to both keep Israel safe and secure and at the same time to always leave room for the possibility of peace. So may it be Your will.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi David Booth