

Rabbi Lewis' message for July/August 2003

The last time I was in Sharm el Sheikh, it was still in Israel. Now it is Egypt. The city itself has not moved, of course, just its temporal land holders. I was there with the Israeli Nature Preservation Society (the Haganat Ha Teva) as we traveled throughout the Sinai peninsula. It was a remote outpost, difficult to reach, used primarily for military access. Now this city that has known different owners has appropriately become the site of the most recent Middle East peace talks.

We again look to the daily headlines to see if this most recently proposed road map to peace will reach its destination. These headlines were in my own head as I read the Haftarah for the week in which I write. Zechariah's words are read twice a year, once during the usual Torah reading cycle and once on the Shabbat of Chanukah. He reminds us to value spiritual might over military might: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." The rabbis assigned the Haftarah to Chanukah as a reminder that, although we value the military victory of that small group of Maccabees, they could not have done it without God's help.

None of us would dispute Israel's right to defend itself militarily. I am reminded of the words of the late Abba Eban (as quoted by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg), an Israeli statesman who usually identified himself as a dove. He pointed out that military success facilitated the three most important events in modern Jewish history: the defeat of Hitler, the birth of the modern state of Israel, and Sadat's decision to sign a peace agreement with Israel. Abba Eban pointed out that Sadat did not sign an agreement because he was convinced of Israel's moral right to exist but because he had accepted that Israel could not be defeated militarily.

Military might can have impact and be a deterrent but it alone will not guarantee freedom, as the years have shown us. What will make this road map succeed if it does will be an agreement on all sides to transcend military might and make a commitment to values that honor human dignity. Zechariah's words may be old but they resonate a new in our ears: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts." May those who meet now in Sinai be inspired by its hallowed history.

Rabbi Ellen J. Lewis
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