

In the Etz Chaim Cumash, the introduction for this week's parsha, Hukat, tells us that this is the parsha where Miriam and Aaron die, and the last generation of Israelites who were at Mt. Sinai is dying off... and the commentary reminds us that it is important to retell the stories from generation to generation. Toward the end of the parsha, there are commentaries on the battles against enemies Sichon and Og and the Israelites were victorious..

So this week, I'd like to take a few minutes to try and relate these two commentaries to events that happened on this date in history. Does anyone know the date?? Yes, it's June 14th, in my house, we know it as my niece, Talia's birthday. It's also Flag Day. But I was referring to the Hebrew date of.. 6th of Tammuz.

On the sixth of Tammuz in 1096, crusaders massacred the Jews of Mehr. In 1244, two dozen wagonloads of holy Jewish books were burned in public in Paris. In 1941, Nazis capture Lvov home to over 100,000 Jews and murdered over 5000 of them within a matter of days..

But for a few minutes, I want to take you back to July 4, 1976.. that was when we, as Americans were celebrating our bicentennial... did anyone realize that day was also 6th of Tammuz... and in 1976, Israeli soldiers were raiding Entebbe and rescuing 103 Jewish hostages.

When I was trying to research what to talk about tonight and I came across the Hebrew date and the significance, I thought it would be easy to put some words together.. but I realized that I had no direct recollection of the events from 1976 (as I was just a few years old at the time of the raid). I had definitely heard about the stories from Rivke Berkowitz... so I did a little research on the raid on Entebbe.. next stop will be watching a few movies, which I'm sure Jonathan won't mind !

The rescue took place on July 4th. One week earlier, an Air France flight was hijacked by Palestinian terrorists, who landed the plane in Uganda with the support of dictator Idi Amin. The terrorists threatened to kill the Jewish hostages if the Israeli government did not release convicted Palestinian terrorists. (Amazingly, the flight crew all voluntarily chose to stay with the Jewish captives rather than be released; upon their return to Paris, they were reprimanded by Air

France executives and temporarily suspended from duty. Later, the flight crew members were honored for their decision by the French government.)

The government of Israel refused to negotiate with the terrorists, and quickly planned a rescue mission. Conveniently, Israel had the blueprints for the building in which the hostages were held -- it was built by an Israeli construction firm. Two hundred Israeli soldiers were flown to Entebbe. They stopped to refuel in Kenya. The IDF brought along a black Mercedes disguised to look like Idi Amin's personal car. Israeli planes landed with the back door of the plane open, drove the cars out, and started the raid.

The raid took a total of 58 minutes, in which all the terrorists were killed, and all but three of the hostages were safely rescued. The raid, dubbed Operation Thunderbolt, was subsequently renamed Operation Yonatan -- after Col. Yonatan Netanyahu (brother of Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu), the leader of the raid, and the only Israeli soldier killed.

Israel took some heat for failing to pursue the political route, however they did try and negotiate with Idi Amin and others in the PFLP.

In his address to the Security Council, Israeli ambassador Chaim Herzog said: "We come with a simple message to the Council: we are proud of what we have done because we have demonstrated to the world that a small country, in Israel's circumstances, with which the members of this Council are by now all too familiar, the dignity of man, human life and human freedom constitute the highest values. We are proud not only because we have saved the lives of over a hundred innocent people—men, women and children—but because of the significance of our act for the cause of human freedom."

Entebbe continues to stand as a model of victory and of how victory is achieved. The victory reminds us the value of the Israeli Defense Force, which our guest lecturer mentioned last week as well, at the Rabbi Isaac Klein weekend—when he spoke about the importance of serving in the IDF and securing Jews around the world and the State of Israel...

Which brings us back to the Parsha.... Not only were there battles against Sichon and Og in this parsha , but the parsha also discusses...

The Amalekites, disguised as Canaanites, attack the Jews. The Jews pray to G-d and are victorious in battle.

The parsha concludes with “The Jews approach the land of the Emorites, which lies on the east bank of the Jordan River. They send a message to Sichon, king of the Emorites, asking permission to pass through his land en route to Canaan. Sichon refuses and instead masses his armies and attack the Jews. The Jews are victorious and occupy the Emorite lands.”

So...Under the leadership of Moshe, the Israelites quickly vanquish Sichon, the Amorite king and his army.

Sichon had just been victorious over the Moavites and was not convinced of Israel’s benign intentions of just walking through the land. At the time, the victory over Moav had established Sichon as a ruler of the region, he had a kingdom extending along the entire upper half of the Dead sea, along the banks of the Jordan all way up to Golan Heights. Who could imagine or think of attacking Sichon who seemed to be powerful.

Then the Israelites come and ask for passage. They are rebuffed and attack with force (sounds like what happened in Entebbe.. Israel tried to negotiate, were told no, and then attacked and were victorious). In Sichon, the Israelites prevail and the surrounding nations look on in disbelief.

The Israelites conquer the entire territory and the capital Cheshbon. There is a midrash (which I’m not reading fully) that indicates that Cheshbon has a meaning of ‘calculation’. So the rabbis taught “let us calculate the potential loss that one might suffer from doing a mitzvah against its reward.. and the reward seemingly gained from committing a sin against its ultimate loss...” So, too, the IDF must calculate when developing their plans for Entebbe about what risks to take or not to take, and how to get the best outcome.

To round out the story, the parsha concludes with the battle against Og (who happens to be a giant.. if you read the midrashim, it is quite fascinating, but might be for another time..). The torah tells us that “Og, king of Bashan, then attacks the Jews. The Jews are triumphant again; they kill Og and occupy his land too.

Now the Jewish nation has reached the bank of the Jordan River, just across from the city of Jericho in the land of Israel.”

The battles and victories over Sichon and Og are mentioned multiple times in later books of prophets (in Yehoshua, Shoftim, YirmiyaU).. and in Tehillim as well..

The parsha reminds that the just as Jews were victorious over enemies in their fight to secure the land of Israel, so too were we victorious in Entebbe. Lessons from all of the battles continue to remind us the sacrifice that armed forces make to protect us and keep us free. Yes, while it's flag day here in the US and the sixth of Tammuz on the Hebrew calendar, we should be thankful to be free and able to celebrate our freedom.

Shabbat Shalom.