

Israel Connection

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Shavuot: Gifts and Responsibilities

THE TALMUD (BT SHABBAT 86b-88a)

TELLS US that the Ten Commandments were given on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan. This date, established as the holiday of Shavuot, is, thus, *z'man matan torateinu*, the celebration of the gift of our Torah.

One of our greatest sages, Saadia Ga'on, taught us that the Torah connects us as a people. We've held on to the Torah spiritually—its ideas and model of ethical behavior. And we've held on to it physically, going to great lengths to rescue and care for the scrolls themselves. Torah is literally, *chayeinu v'oreich yameinu*, our lives and the length of our days.

Today, we are not just called upon to receive law, but, in the secular world, to help make law as well. As Americans, we have a right and an obligation to involve ourselves in the law-making process to help make sure that our leaders make good decisions. Secular law is a reflection of the values we hold as a society and helps determine the future

of our country and America's role in the world.

As Americans we must take advantage of our responsibility to participate fully in the political process by educating our elected officials about the importance of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship. Each of us has the chance to build meaningful relationships with our leaders and to become their partners in shaping our country and our world.

One of the most tangible indicators of ongoing U.S. support for the Jewish state is American aid to Israel. This spring, as the United States and Israel work together to craft a new aid agreement, it is important for us to engage in conversations with our leaders about the vital role American aid to Israel plays in helping secure Israel's future and America's interests in the region.

This Shavuot, as we celebrate the gift of Torah, let us also remember that there are gifts and responsibilities inherent in American citizenship as well.

American Aid: Affecting Israel's Future



A VITAL PART OF THE U.S.-ISRAEL

ALLIANCE manifests itself in American financial assistance to Israel.

The underlying agreement for American aid to Israel that has been in place for the last decade expires this year. When that aid accord was achieved in 1997, during the Oslo process, it was based on a set of assumptions regarding the threats that Israel was likely to face over a 10-year horizon.

Who could have imagined what was to come? Terrorism, war as well as regional and international isolation. In 1997, there were threats to Israel, but they are not comparable to the challenges that Israel faces today, nor the dangers the state will likely face in the decade to come.

Throughout all of these challenges, the United States remains Israel's only reliable partner.

That is why we must help our members of Congress—the 65 freshmen members, in particular—understand the importance of foreign aid to Israel. We must talk to them about the need to secure this year's current request of \$2.4 billion to ensure Israel's qualitative military edge, and we also must begin to lay the groundwork about the importance of Israel's future aid.



Meeting with members of Congress is one of the best ways to help secure a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

AIPAC Achievements

AS AMERICA'S LEADING PRO-ISRAEL LOBBY, AIPAC works with both Democratic and Republican political leaders around the country to ensure that the U.S.-Israel relationship remains strong and vital. With the support of its members nationwide, AIPAC has worked with Congress and the Executive Branch on numerous critical initiatives, including:

■ **Reiterating standards for the Palestinian government** through letters signed by 259 House members and 79 senators urging the European Union and United States not to provide aid or grant recognition to any Palestinian government until it fulfills internationally backed requirements.

■ **Strengthening U.S.-Israel homeland security cooperation** by passing landmark legislation creating an office within the Department of Homeland Security to support joint research and development projects between the United States and key allies such as Israel.

■ **Securing critical foreign aid to Israel**, which totaled \$2.52 billion in 2006 and will provide military and economic assistance.

■ **Passing the Iran Freedom Support Act**, which renews and strengthens sanctions aimed at curtailing funds and international cooperation necessary for Iran to pursue nuclear weapons.

■ **Extending U.S.-backed loan guarantees to Israel until 2011** and renewing the authority to transfer U.S. military equipment to be stored in Israel for use in a potential crisis.



Support for AIPAC's Synagogue Initiative has been generously provided via Legacy Heritage Fund Limited.

Training the Next Generation Of Pro-Israel Political Activists

AS STUDENTS AROUND THE COUNTRY PARTICIPATE IN GRADUATION CEREMONIES, confirmations and end of the school year activities, the natural question to ask at this time of year is: "What next?"

American culture and Judaism's tradition of *tikkun olam* encourages youth to get involved in world affairs and politics. For close to three decades, AIPAC has been helping pave the way for college and even high school students to take part in the political process through award winning educational programs, Washington, D.C. internships and the chance to lobby members of Congress face to face.

As we celebrate Shavuot—the giving of the law to the Jewish people—we should also remember to encourage our children and grandchildren to take advantage of the unique opportunities they have to help shape American laws and policy through the political system.

What next? Maybe AIPAC's Summer Seminar Series in Washington, D.C., where leading legislators address students interning in D.C. for the summer. AIPAC also sponsors summer programs around the country.

To learn more about how high school and college activists can get involved with AIPAC and help shape America and Israel's future, visit: www.aipac.org. Click "For Students."

Next Year Put yourself in the picture.



The AIPAC Policy Conference June 2–4, 2008 Washington, D.C.

Make plans now to be part of the group *The New York Times* calls, "The most important organization affecting America's relationship with Israel."

To view video from this year's conference and to register in time to take advantage of a special "early bird" discount, visit: www.aipac.org.