The Importance of Relationships

There is no lack of drama in the story of Purim. Consider the characters: An out-of-touch ruler, a power-hungry right-hand man, a courageous heroine and her politically savvy uncle. You can hear the trailer now—“In a world where a community faces annihilation...” The stars of the story are well known—Esther, Mordecai, Haman (may his name be blotted out), and Achashverosh. But one name is missing. Nowhere in the Book of Esther is the name of G-d mentioned.

The only possible reference to G-d in the Book of Esther may be found in Chapter 4, verse 14. In a message to Esther, Mordecai writes, “… if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance may come to the Jews from ‘another place,’ but you and your father’s house will perish.” Rabbinic commentators interpret “another place” (Hebrew: Makom Achar) to mean G-d.

Perhaps though, the seemingly hidden presence of the Almighty is, in fact, a lesson for us today.

We can’t depend on divine intervention to protect the Jewish people and the Jewish state—Israel. Nor can we stand idly by and wait for our neighbors to take action. Rather, Israel’s safety and security is in our hands.

But we need not bear the responsibility alone.

Like Esther, we can build relationship and alliances with those who can come to our aid and help to protect us. Like Esther, we can build important relationships with our country’s leaders.

No friendship has been more important to the state of Israel than its bond with the United States. Democrats and Republicans together have continually demonstrated their shared support, providing needed security and irreplaceable diplomatic assistance at critical moments in the continuing story of our people.

Today we can be proud that because of the U.S.-Israel partnership, we need not wonder if our help will come from “another place.” But we can’t stop. We can’t become silent. We must always play a title role in keeping Israel safe and America strong.

Combating Economic Warfare against Israel

Founded in 2005, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement seeks to stigmatize, isolate and delegitimize Israel. In Europe, some governments employ BDS activities to unilaterally pressure Israel into changing its policies. In the United States, the BDS movement manifests in anti-Israel academic, cultural and economic activities.

Thankfully, the American pro-Israel community is working with Congress to combat attempts to harm Israel economically.

In 2015, Congress approved a first-of-its-kind initiative to address economic BDS, including an amendment in the “Fast Track” Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) bill that targets harmful anti-Israel trade and commercial practices in Europe. The bipartisan amendment instructs American trade negotiators that a principal objective in trade negotiations with the European Union (EU) is to discourage economic attacks against Israel and to ensure that our trading partners take no actions that could limit U.S.-Israel commerce.

More recently, these provisions were leveraged by members of Congress to take a bipartisan stand against new EU labeling requirements for Israeli goods produced in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. In November 2015, the authors of the TPA amendment, Sens. Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Rob Portman (R-OH) and Reps. Peter Roskam (R-IL) and Juan Vargas (D-CA), wrote a letter to U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman saying, “We strongly encourage you to utilize the anti-BDS provisions in TPA to weigh in with the EU to express new opposition to these new labeling guidelines and any further actions they might be contemplating to restrict commerce with Israel, isolate Israel and exert unilateral economic pressure on Israel to make political concessions outside of the negotiating process.”

To learn more about how you can help defend Israel against economic warfare, visit www.aipac.org.
As domestic and foreign entities seek to delegitimize and isolate Israel through economic warfare, the United States is choosing to combat divestment with investment. This map showcases just a few of the many U.S. states that are forging ties and promoting increased cooperation with the "Startup Nation."
My parents were both Holocaust survivors. They lived in a time when Jews were stateless and powerless. Now, just one generation later, their daughter regularly meets with members of Congress to advocate for a strong relationship between the United States and the Jewish State of Israel.

How fortunate we are to have a Jewish State in our lifetime. How fortunate we are to be Americans—to live in a country whose citizens are not merely allowed to participate in the political process, but whose citizens are expected and encouraged to play a meaningful role. Political activism is not just a right of American citizenship, it is a responsibility.

I urge you to join me in exercising these rights and responsibilities to strengthen the U.S.-Israel relationship—I urge you to advocate for policies that make our country stronger and the Jewish homeland more secure. I urge you to become an AIPAC activist.

AIPAC is the vehicle which allows us to engage in pro-Israel politics in a meaningful way. But that vehicle is powered by you. AIPAC can’t do it alone. I can’t do it alone. We need you! We need to do this together.

No matter your political affiliation, age or racial background—AIPAC is the means to ensure that Israel will always have America’s support. AIPAC is the organization to ensure the vibrancy and strength of both democracies, united in a shared vision of a better world.

So, I invite you. Join me. Increase your activism. Regularly communicate with your member of Congress and senators and let them know how much you care about a strong U.S.-Israel alliance. Let us be mindful—if we are not for ourselves, who will be for us, and if not now, when?

Lillian Pinkus, an active member of Congregation Shearith Israel of Dallas, Texas, will be installed as AIPAC president in March 2016.