

JUNE 8, 2008

Parashat B'ha'alotchah

A Light unto the Nations

B'ha'alotchah et ha'nerot – “When you light the lamps” (Numbers 8:2)

Isaiah (Isaiah 42:5-6) taught us that the best way to do *tikun olam*, repairing the world, is by setting an example for the nations to admire and emulate –being a beacon of light in a world of darkness. The Torah alludes to this great illumination in the commandment to light the menorah. God commands Aharon and his sons that *b'ha'alotchah et ha'nerot* – “When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the candlestick” (Numbers 8:2). We generally refer to the kindling of a fire in Hebrew using the word *l'hadlik* so why the unusual language of *b'ha'alotchah*? Rabbeinu Bechaya (on 8:2) explains that the word *b'ha'alotchah* comes from “the language of elevation” – *leha'alot* – meaning to raise up. To illustrate his point he quotes the Midrash Rabbah (Bamidbar Rabbah 15:5) that teaches us, “Said God to the Jewish people: It is not that I need your light. Rather, you should shine before me like I shone before you with the pillar of fire in the desert, in order to elevate you in the eyes of the nations...” The light of the Menorah reminds us that we must always strive to be Isaiah’s “light of the nations,” shining the light of God before the world through our national activities, actions and aspirations.

Recently at AIPAC’s Policy Conference both parties’ presumptive Presidential nominees emphasized these concepts of Israel being a light unto the nations and working to repair the world.

The presumptive Democratic Presidential nominee, Barack Obama, stated, “Israel is not a perfect place, but like the United States it sets an example for all when it seeks a more perfect future. These same qualities can be found among American Jews. It is why so many Jewish Americans have stood by Israel...because there is a commitment embedded in the Jewish faith and tradition: to freedom and fairness; to social justice and equal opportunity. To *tikun olam* - the obligation to repair this world.” The presumptive Republican Presidential nominee, John McCain, also commented on these themes stating that, “Israel has endured, and thrived, and her people have built a nation that is an inspiration to free nations everywhere.” Continuing, “The threats to Israel's security are large and growing, and America's commitment must grow as well...Israel's enemies are too numerous, it's margin of error too small, and our shared interests and values too great for us to follow any other policy.” To view speeches from Policy Conference click [here](#).

When we support and defend Israel’s shining example of democracy, vibrancy, strength, openness and resilience, we help kindle the light of the menorah by bringing light to the world through the achievements of the Jewish State. ■

The Amazing Ark

Vayehi bensoa ha'aron – “And it came to pass when the ark set forward” (Numbers 10:35)

Despite common convention most opinions state that there are actually seven books in the Torah. According to Rebbe in Gemara Shabbat (115b) the two inverted *nuns* that surround the above verse and the following verse (10:36) signify that these verses represent an entire and complete book of the Torah. Thus the seven books of the Torah are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers up to this point, these two verses, Numbers from this point to the end, and Deuteronomy. What’s so important about the ark that these two verses should represent an entire book in the Torah? The Midrash Yelamdeinu relates a fascinating legend about the ark: “Said Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat in the name of

Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra: When Israel would travel, the ark would venture out before them. Two sparks of fire would emanate from between the poles of the ark...and kill the enemies of Israel.” The travels of the ark represent the miraculous nature of Israel’s triumph over its enemies. It is for this reason that these two verses represent an entire book of the Bible, as they uniquely highlight the special and unique relationship between God and the Jewish people.

Nowadays, we no longer enjoy the miraculous protection of the ark, but there is still a special and unique relationship that helps ensure Israel’s safety.

Today, the U.S.-Israel alliance remains more critical than ever as the two countries face an unprecedented array of shared threats. From a potential nuclear-armed Iran to the expanding military capabilities of the terrorist groups Hamas and Hizballah, Israel is finding it increasingly difficult- and expensive- to meet these challenges. Implementation of a 2007 U.S.-Israel security agreement, which pledges to provide Israel with \$30 billion in military assistance during the next decade, is vital to ensuring that Israel maintains its qualitative military edge over those adversaries that threaten the Jewish state and actively work to undermine U.S. interests in the region. In signing the memorandum of understanding then-Undersecretary of State, Nicholas Burns stressed that the agreement represents a vital U.S. “investment in peace” and that “a secure and strong Israel is in the interests of the United States.” Both countries have long recognized that their mutual interests in deterring war, promoting stability and eventually achieving peace are only possible if the United States continues to ensure Israel’s qualitative military edge over her potential adversaries.

Through the continued support of Israel’s military strength we can continue to follow in the path of the ark and provide protection for the people of Israel. ■

The Enemies of God

Kuma Adonai v’yafutsu oyevecha – “Rise up, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered” (Numbers 10:35)

Who are the enemies of God that the verse refers to? Rashi (on 10:35) explains that “These are the enemies of Israel. For anyone who hates Israel also hates He who spoke and created the world.” Rashi proves his point by quoting a fascinating series of verses from Psalms chapter 83. There King David laments the silence of God in response to provocation from the enemies of Israel. David writes, “O God, keep not Your silence; hold not Your peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, Your enemies are in an uproar; and they that hate You have lifted up their head. They hold crafty converse against Your people, and take counsel against Your treasured ones. They have said: ‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance.’” (Psalms 83:2-5)

The words of King David written over two millennia ago resonate strongly today as we witness enemies of Israel who would see her destroyed.

Recently Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinijad upped his ante of hateful rhetoric by repeating the “crafty converse against God’s people” mentioned by King David almost word for word. While David’s enemies wanted to “cut them off from being a nation,” Iran’s president recently told a news conference at a U.N. food summit in Rome that Israel “will cease to exist” and “was doomed to go.” Iran poses a growing threat to Israel and the United States as it continues rapidly advancing towards a nuclear weapons capability. Her acquisition of nuclear arms would likely touch off a regional nuclear arms race among Middle Eastern countries, which could well mark the death knell of the global non-proliferation regime and make the world a much more dangerous place. Sanctions are having an impact on Iran, but more needs to be done now to persuade Tehran to change course. The United State should fully utilize available economic, political, and diplomatic tools –including sanctioning Iran’s Central Bank and foreign companies investing in Iran’s oil sector.

We must continue to urge our leaders to maintain political and economic pressure on Iran, to ensure that the enemies of God never attain the ability to carry out their terrible goals. ■

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