

JUNE 8, 2009

Parashat Beha'alotecha

Making a Contribution

Beha'alotecha et haneiroth – “When you kindle the lamps” (Numbers 8:2)

There is no apparent connection between the conclusion of Nasso, which discusses the dedication of the Tabernacle by the princes, and the initial section of this week's *parashah*, which describes the commandment for Aaron to light the menorah daily. Why then do the two sections appear successively in the text? Basing his comments on the Midrash Agadah, Rashi points out that neither Aaron nor his tribe of Levi had a part in the gifts or the ceremony of the Tabernacle's consecration, and thus Aaron felt a pang of jealousy after seeing the generous contributions of the princes. Sensing Aaron's anguish, “Said God, I swear to you that your [contribution] will be greater than any of theirs, for you [will] kindle and light the lamps.” By placing Aaron's obligation to light the menorah in this context, Rashi highlights the ability of every individual, not only the wealthy, to make a contribution.

While Aaron was not able to give the lavish gifts that the princes offered, he was able to make a lasting impact by providing his time and dedication. These days, we can all learn from Aaron's example and do our part to contribute to the security of Israel.

Recently, tens of thousands of Israel's supporters, including New York Governor David Paterson, and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, gave their time to celebrate the Jewish State as they crowded New York's Fifth Avenue as part of the annual Salute to Israel Parade, the New York Post reported. As the marchers at the parade lent critical support to the State of Israel, they also sent a powerful message to their Representatives: that support for Israel is an important issue. While most of us could not travel to New York to attend the parade, we are able to write letters, send emails and call our elected officials in order to send the message that support for Israel is an important issue for us as well. By dedicating our time and efforts to advocate on behalf the U.S.-Israel relationship we can all play a key roll in ensuring Israel's security. For specific ways which you and your congregants can affect Israel's future and promote America's interests, go to www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

While most of us are not “princes,” we certainly have the ability to “kindle a lamp” within ourselves and those around us. Like Aaron in the Tabernacle, we can offer the greatest gift – our time and dedication. ■

Proponents of Hate

Viyanusu misanecha mipanecha – “and let them that hate You flee before You” (Numbers 10:35)

This famous verse, chanted by many congregations while opening the ark before the Torah reading, utilizes striking language to describe those that hate God. Instead of calling them *sonecha* – “those who hate You,” the text calls them *misanecha* – literally meaning “those who cause hatred for You.” Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, noting the unique grammar in the verse, explains that this curious word refers to “the propaganda of hatred.” The opening words of Psalms 83 articulate this idea: “O God, keep not your silence...For, lo, your enemies are in an uproar; and **they that hate You** have lifted up the 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)

Even in our modern times we continue to see proliferators of hate who seek “that the name of Israel may be no more,” a sentiment voiced by Iran’s leadership. As Iranians go to the polls on June 12th to elect their president, it is important to heed the words of hate emanating from the Islamic Republic.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is seeking a second term in office, recently reiterated his anti-Semitic views by calling the Holocaust a “big deception,” Agence France Presse reported. Further, Ahmadinejad said that the liberal democracies are responsible for degrading human values, stating “The identity of the liberal democracy has been exposed to the world by its protection of the most criminal regime in the history of humanity, the Zionist regime, by using the big deception of the Holocaust.” Ahmadinejad’s comments are just the latest in a slew of Holocaust-denying and anti-Israel comments.

While the vile rhetoric emanating from Iran is certainly dangerous, the greater threat stems from the country’s pursuit of nuclear weapons. Following a new report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that “The report on Iran again contains serious findings of increased uranium enrichment in Iran, in violation of Security Council resolutions, as well as other activities that could be connected to a military nuclear program. The report also emphasizes the IAEA’s inability to carry out full and effective monitoring in Iran due to that country’s continued lack of cooperation...Accordingly, what is needed from the international community is immediate and determined action to ensure that Iran will not be able to produce nuclear weapons.”

Iran’s frightening combination of propaganda and hatred epitomizes the meaning of the term *mesanecha* in the text. The Islamic Republic’s proliferation of hatred for Israel, along with its attempts to develop nuclear weapons, compels us to use the power of punitive economic measures to convince Iran to change course. ■

The Sounds of Sirens

Vahareyotem bachatzotzrot - “you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets” (Numbers 10:9)

The Torah states that “When you go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets...” (10:9) These trumpets not only served as an alarm, but also as a form of prayer which was used in times of danger and despair. Maimonides (Laws of Fasting, 1:2) called the sounding of the trumpets “the ways of repentance,” and explained that these trumpet blasts alerted the people to retreat from sin and repent. Thus, the sounds of the trumpets were a call to the people to change their ways and help avert the calamity facing the nation.

Just as the trumpets described in the Torah were designed to call the nation to a heightened sense of alert in order to avoid a catastrophe, the modern State of Israel recently used sirens as part of an exercise to prepare the state against a potential disaster.

In a recent five-day civil defense exercise named Turning Point 3, which simulated an all-out attack on the country, Israel conducted the most extensive drills in state history to practice measures to safeguard civilians. Sirens wailed across Israel on the morning of June 2nd, sending many into shelters as part of the exercise to test the response to a “doomsday” mix of missile attacks, suicide bombings and natural disasters. “The purpose of the siren is to affect the consciousness of the Israeli public,” Deputy Defense Minister Matan Vilnai said. “Every citizen of the state should know that an emergency drill can take place anytime anywhere, and how they should act.” The sirens, which were sounded simultaneously throughout the country, served as a stark reminder to Israel’s population that the threats to Israel’s security are immense, diverse and could emanate from any direction.

Like the trumpets in the Torah, Israel’s siren blasts remind us of the very real dangers that the Jewish State faces. In addition, they also remind us why we must work so hard to ensure that Israel has the ability to defend herself. ■