



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 22, 2010

Parashat Tzav, Shabbat Hagadol & Pesach

Protecting the Fire (for Parashat Tzav)

Esh tamid...lo tichbeh – “It shall be a permanent fire...you shall not extinguish it” (Leviticus 6:6)

The Torah alludes multiple times to the permanence of the fire on the altar. In verse two we read of the fire burning “all night into the morning,” in verse five we read, “And the fire upon the altar shall be kept burning, it shall not go out,” and in the very next verse the Torah states that the “Fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out.” How did the Israelites preserve the fire when they traveled? Rabbi Yehudah, quoted in the Jerusalem Talmud (Yoma, 4:6), explained that when the Israelites dismantled the Tabernacle they removed a bit of the original flame and covered it with a flask to protect it for future use. Through this act, the Israelites demonstrated that continuity demands attention and care—and that it cannot be taken for granted.

Like the permanent flame on the altar of the Tabernacle, the U.S.-Israel relationship has withstood the test of time. Since the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, the U.S. and Israel have shared a constant, enduring friendship. And, like the flame on the altar, this friendship needs our care, attention and protection.

During his recent visit to Israel, Vice President Joe Biden said that the relationship between the United States and Israel is “unshakable” and that “There is absolutely no space between the United States and Israel in terms of Israel’s security.” This sentiment is not limited to the Vice President’s office. In the wake of the recent diplomatic flap between the two countries, members of the House of Representatives and the Senate are circulating letters to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urging the administration to reaffirm the strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship and calling for any differences to be resolved amicably as befits longstanding strategic allies.

The House letter, spearheaded by House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and House Republican Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA), asserts that “The United States and Israel are close allies whose people share a deep and abiding friendship based on a shared commitment to core values including democracy, human rights and freedom of the press and religion. Our two countries...share an important strategic relationship. A strong Israel is an asset to the national security of the United States and brings stability to the Middle East.” The Senate letter, led by Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Johnny Isakson (R-GA), states: “We recognize that our government and the Government of Israel will not always agree on particular issues of the peace process. But such differences are best resolved amicably and in a manner that befits longstanding allies. We must never forget the depth and breadth of our alliance and always do our utmost to reinforce a relationship that has benefited both nations for more than six decades.” To contact your Representatives and encourage them to sign the appropriate letter, click [here](#).

We cannot assume that the flame of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship will burn without us. Rather, like the Israelites in the Tabernacle, we must nurture and protect it to ensure a strong Jewish state for years to come. ■

In This Generation (for Passover)

She’bechol dor v’dor omdim aleinu – “In every generation they rise up against us...” (Passover Haggadah)

Laban serves as the archetypal Jewish adversary in the Passover Haggadah: “For Pharaoh only decreed against the males; but Laban sought to uproot everything.” When did Laban attempt to destroy the Jewish nation? An

unattributed medieval commentary (see *Torat Hayyim Hagadah*, p. 82) explains that Laban, following their departure from Haran, chased after Jacob and his family, telling his son-in-law: “It is in my power to hurt you.” Had God not explicitly forbade Laban from harming Jacob, Laban would indeed have used his power to destroy the Jewish nation in its infancy. The Haggadah notes that Laban served as the model for others to follow, as we recite every Passover eve, “In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us.”

Even in modern times there continue to be nations who seek to destroy the Jewish people, and one of these nations—Iran—is rapidly pursuing the technology to do just that.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has made no secret of his yearning for Israel’s destruction. To mark the Jewish state’s 60th anniversary, Ahmadinejad said that “...this regime [Israel] is on its way to annihilation.” In 2008, Ahmadinejad said that “the Zionist Regime of Israel faces a dead end and will under God’s grace be wiped off the map.” Perhaps even more alarming than Ahmadinejad’s desire to see Israel destroyed is his government’s pursuit of weapons which could be used to carry out the task. Iran’s quest for a nuclear weapons capability is clear—from its efforts to buy nuclear weapons from Pakistan in the 1980s to its current production of uranium enriched more closely to the level required for producing a nuclear bomb. Because crippling sanctions still provide the best prospect at this time to persuade Tehran to abandon its nuclear pursuit, the U.S. should immediately tighten enforcement of sanctions law while pushing for the imposition of new, tougher measures. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Only an overt commandment prevented Laban from acting on his desire to destroy Jacob. While Iran has not yet gained the ability to say to Israel, “It is in my power to hurt you” with nuclear weapons, without immediate sanctions designed to stop their nuclear research they soon will. ■

The Fifth Cup (for Passover)

V’heiveiti etchem el ha’aretz – “And I will bring you to the Land...” (Exodus 6:8)

The Talmud (*Yerushalmi Pesachim* 10:1) notes that the four cups of wine we drink during the *seder* emanate from the four phrases of redemption found in God’s promise to Moses in verses six and seven: “I will remove you”; “I will save you”; “I will redeem you” and “I will take you.” Yet, the next verse mentions a fifth phrase of redemption, “And I will bring you to the Land.” We commemorate this fifth formulation with the fifth cup, the cup of Elijah the Prophet. Through this final cup we declare the bond that exists between Israel’s true redemption and the Jewish nation residing in its own sovereign land. Quite simply, without a country to call home the Jewish people would remain incomplete.

While the Jewish people celebrate their connection to the Land of Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and many Arab states—through their ongoing attempts to delegitimize Israel—refuse to accept the sovereignty of a Jewish state. Unfortunately, it is this refusal that forms the greatest barrier to achieving peace in the Middle East.

When asked by radio host Don Imus about the recent tensions between the United States and Israel, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) said that “The problem with Israel and the Palestinians is...the existence of Israel. If the existence of Israel were recognized by its neighbors, we might have a better opportunity to sit down and have meaningful negotiations.” In fact, Israel has repeatedly called for direct, face-to-face talks with the Palestinians. Israel has also taken bold steps to increase trust between the two parties, including removing roadblocks, dismantling checkpoints and instituting a 10 month moratorium on construction in the West Bank which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called “unprecedented.” Despite these efforts, the PA continues to demand preconditions to negotiations—all while inciting violence and honoring those who attack Israel. For more on how the PA’s stance on talks obstructs U.S. and Israeli peace efforts, click [here](#).

Pouring the fifth cup of wine at the *seder* demonstrates our understanding that the Israelites’ entrance into the Land completed the redemption and transformed us into a nation. Once the Arab world accepts this fact then truly meaningful and productive talks will have a chance of leading to a resolution of the conflict and a lasting peace. ■