

JUNE 6, 2011

Parashat Beha'alotecha & Shavuot

Burning Brightly (for Beha'alotecha)

When you light the lamps (Numbers 8:2)

בהעלותך את הנרות (במדבר ח:ב)

The Hebrew word most often used to connote the lighting of an object is *lehadlik*. We find this word in both the blessing on the Shabbat candles as well as the blessing on the Hanukkah candles (*lehadlik ner shel...*). Why then does the Torah use the word *leha'alot*, which also means “to raise up,” when instructing Aaron about the lighting of the *menorah* in the Tabernacle? Rashi (on 8:2) explains that the unusual word adds an additional layer of meaning: “Because the flame rises when kindled...[this teaches us] that [the priest] must kindle the lamp until the flame rises on its own.”

This beautiful imagery highlights the appropriate manner of giving assistance. When we help another person, we must ensure that the recipient of that aid has grown strong enough to burn brightly by himself. Indeed, America’s support of Israel is based on this very notion.

According to a new page on the White House’s [website](#), “The President believes that every state has the right to self-defense, and that Israel must be able to defend itself—by itself—against any threat.” This sentiment underscores America’s efforts to ensure that Israel has the ability to defend herself. President Obama recently called attention to some of these measures, [stating](#): “As I said at the United Nations last year, Israel’s existence must not be a subject for debate, and efforts to chip away at Israel’s legitimacy will only be met by the unshakable opposition of the United States. So when the Durban Review Conference advanced anti-Israel sentiment, we withdrew. In the wake of the Goldstone Report, we stood up strongly for Israel’s right to defend itself. When an effort was made to insert the United Nations into matters that should be resolved through direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, we vetoed it. And so in both word and deed, we have been unwavering in our support of Israel’s security.” These actions, along with the \$3.075 billion in security assistance which President Obama has requested for Israel for the 2012 fiscal year, all highlight America’s unwavering commitment to make certain that Israel has the means to defend herself.

Like the kindling of the oil of the *menorah*, performed in a way that lets the new lantern burn on its own, America most clearly supports Israel by making sure that she has the tools to stand strong and defend herself, by herself. ■

Standing Under the Mountain (for Shavuot)

And they stood under the mountain (Exodus 19:17)

ייתצבו בתחתית ההר (שמות יט:יז)

In Shabbat 88a, the Talmud expands on the unusual phrase “And they stood under the mountain,” relating a surprising allegorical take on the giving of the Torah: “This teaches us that God held the mountain over them like a barrel and said to them, ‘If you accept the Torah—good, but if not—there will be your grave.’” In essence, God forced the people to accept the Torah. Yet, how can the Jewish people be obligated to keep the Torah if we were forced to accept it? The Talmud states that today we are bound to the Torah because “they [the Jewish people] accepted [the Torah] later on during the days of Ahashveirosh [on Purim].” Thus, while the Jewish people have had the Torah since Moses descended Mt. Sinai, it only became binding upon us when we willingly accepted it.

This Talmudic allegory demonstrates that a successful agreement requires genuine commitment from the involved parties. From this perspective, it is clear that the Palestinians cannot force their demands upon Israel through third parties, but rather, in order to achieve a true and lasting peace, the parties must reach an agreement themselves.

Despite repeated calls by Israel and the United States to hold direct talks, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has instead launched a campaign to win international support for the recognition of a Palestinian state. This campaign will culminate in an effort to have a Palestinian state accepted as a member of the U.N. this September. Thankfully, resolutions were recently introduced in the House of Representatives ([H. Res. 268](#)) by House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA) and House Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD), and in the Senate ([S. Res. 185](#)) by Sens. Ben Cardin (D-MD), Susan Collins (R-ME), Robert Casey (D-PA), John Thune (R-SD), Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Jim Risch (R-ID), that call on the administration to lead opposition against the Palestinians' efforts regarding unilateral statehood. This legislation also proposes a major change in U.S. relations with the PA, including a suspension of aid, if it includes a Hamas that has not renounced violence, recognized Israel's right to exist and agreed to adhere to all existing agreements. To urge your representatives to support this legislation, click [here](#).

Even the Torah itself, the bedrock of the relationship between God and the Jewish people, could not be imposed upon the nation through one-sided action. Now, an agreement will not be reached until the PA changes course, abandons unilateral efforts, and decides that it would rather seek peace with Israel than with the terrorist organization Hamas. ■

Painful Memories (for Shavuot – Yizkor)

May God remember... (Shavuot Prayers)

יזכור אלקים... (תפילה של שבועות)

In his seminal work on Jewish history, *Zakhor*, Professor Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi writes that “Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people. Its reverberations are everywhere, but they reach a crescendo in the Deuteronomic history and in the prophets: ‘Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past’ (Deuteronomy 32:7).” Memory has always played a critical role in defining us, and by looking back we can also look forward. Remembering those who came before us helps us define the path that lies ahead. For this reason, even though it can be painful for us to remember those who have passed, we take time during each holiday to remember our loved ones, the lessons from their lives and the unique legacies they left behind.

This Shavuot, as we remember those we have lost, Israelis will collectively mourn the recent ten-year anniversary of the Dolphinarium bombing—one of the most tragic and deadly terrorist attacks of the Second Intifada.

On June 1, 2001, a Palestinian terrorist linked to Hamas blew himself up outside the Dolphinarium discotheque on a beachfront in Tel Aviv, killing 21 youths and injuring 132. Lilya Zhukovsky has a clear memory of that night, the last time she saw her daughter [Marina Berkovsky](#) alive. As [The Jerusalem Post](#) reports, when Marina left to go to the Dolphinarium, she told her mother “to go to sleep and then just wake up to open the door for her.” But, Lilya never had the chance to open the door for her daughter when she returned home. Marina was killed in the bombing. “It is hard for me to talk about this and I am sure it is hard for you to listen,” the 61-year-old Lilya said. “I have spoken to groups from America and other places and told them my story about this tragedy that I have suffered. I think it is very important. People think that we, Israelis, do not want to live together [with Arabs] in peace, but it is not true, we are just scared and no one thinks about this.”

As we recite Yizkor this Shavuot, remembering the loved ones that we and all of Israel have lost, we must also think of our futures and their possibilities. With the memory of Marina and so many innocent victims like her, let us resolve to continue to work to achieve peace—for those who have gone before us and those yet to come who deserve a chance to live their lives in peace. ■