

APRIL 18, 2011

Passover

Persistent Attention (Seventh Day)

And the Children of Israel lifted up their eyes (Exodus 14:10) (וישאו בני ישראל את עיניהם (שמות יד:י))

The Torah describes the moment when the Jewish people realized that they were stuck between the sea and an advancing Egyptian army, stating that “they lifted up their eyes, and behold Egypt was traveling after them, and they became very fearful” (14:10). Bechor Shor (on 14:8) explains that because the Israelites had received permission to leave Egypt, they were not focused on the actions of the ancient Egyptians and were therefore surprised to find themselves in danger. Amos Chacham (see Da’at Mikra on Shemot) emphasizes how little attention the Israelites paid to the Egyptians at this time, noting that this same phrase was used when describing the *akeidah*: “And Abraham lifted up his eyes and he saw and behold there was a ram” (Genesis 22:13). In both cases the Torah describes the lifting up of eyes to demonstrate a myopic focus and lack of broader attention.

Because the Israelites considered themselves free, they did not pay attention to the threat that the Egyptian army continued to pose. With global attention now focused on the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, the international community is at risk of making this same mistake by ignoring Iran’s pursuit of nuclear weapons.

In recent months the popular uprisings which began in Tunisia and have since spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria and other countries have captured the world’s attention. Yet, with the international community focused on the “Arab spring,” Iran is advancing ever closer to developing nuclear weapons. In addition to the Iranian foreign minister’s recent [confirmation](#) that a factory west of Tehran is manufacturing centrifuge parts and other components for Iran’s nuclear program, the Islamic Republic also recently announced that it “will continue enriching uranium to 20 percent level to fuel ‘four to five’ nuclear research reactors it intends to build in the ‘next few years,’” [Agence France Presse](#) reported. Speaking to journalists in Russia, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu summed up the situation: “what is happening right now in the Middle East does not take away from the importance of battling the Iranian nuclear threat, because it threatens not only Israel but the entire world.” For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

While the “Arab spring” raises hopes for new freedoms in the Middle East, we must not lose sight of Iran’s continued persistence in advancing its nuclear goals. If we stop paying attention to the Islamic Republic, we might one day soon lift up our eyes and find, like the Israelites in the desert, that only a miracle can prevent a disastrous outcome. ■

Time for Action (Shabbat Chol Hamoed)

Why do you cry to Me? (Exodus 14:15)

מה תצעק אלי (שמות יד:טו)

With their backs against the Red Sea and the Egyptian army advancing, the fledgling Jewish nation turned to Moses for a solution. According to Rashi, when Moses saw no way out either, he turned to God for instruction. God’s answer to Moses’ dilemma seems cryptic at best: “Why do you cry to Me?” (Exodus 14:15). Perhaps the better question is why not cry out to God? After all, in times of danger and distress it seems natural that God would be the first one we turn to. Yet, Rashi explains that when Moses turned to God in prayer, “The Holy One said to him, this is not the time for extended prayer, for the people of Israel are in distress.”

Rashi's explanation of the conversation between God and Moses highlights the importance of action in addition to prayer. And, while we certainly turn to God and pray for Israel's well-being, we should also be thankful that Israel has taken the action to develop new technology to keep her civilians safe.

In late March, Israel deployed the Iron Dome missile defense system for the first time in order to protect citizens from incoming Palestinian rocket attacks, [The New York Times](#) reported. The move came in the wake of a new wave of rockets fired from Gaza at Israeli cities. The Iron Dome is designed to protect Israelis by detecting the arrival of incoming rockets and firing another rocket to shoot it down before it hits its target—the equivalent of shooting a bullet with another bullet. Unfortunately, Israel did not have to wait long to put the new system to use. As you can see from the example [here](#), the Iron Dome has been successfully utilized to intercept rockets, stopping at least eight rockets fired at Ashkelon and Beer Sheba so far. Following the successful deployment, Israel announced that it would buy an additional battery of the system within six months, and up to three more by the end of 2012, [United Press International](#) reported. Thankfully, Congress' recently passed continuing resolution includes \$205 million for Iron Dome missile defense units.

While times have changed, the enemies of Israel continue to advance threateningly—firing ever more sophisticated rockets at the Jewish state. Fortunately, while we continue to pray for Israel's safety, Congress and the developers of the Iron Dome are also taking action to protect the Israeli public. ■

Remembering by Doing (Eighth Day)

May the Lord remember... (Passover Prayer)

יִזְכּוֹר אֱלֹהִים... (תְּפִילָה שֶׁל פֶּסַח)

On the final day of Passover we recite the Yizkor and remember those loved ones who are no longer with us. In addition, many congregations add special Yizkor prayers for the victims of the Holocaust as well as those who perished in defense of Israel. These special prayers carry added significance on Passover, as they mark the Yizkor recited before the commemorations of Yom Hashoah and Yom Hazikaron. But, the Yizkor prayer not only looks backwards, marking the passing of loved ones, but also forward. In the *El Malei Rachamim*, which comprises the second half of the Yizkor service, we pray that God remember our loved ones as we also commit to take action on their behalf, *ba'avor*—"because I will"—either pray, or give charity to elevate their souls.

As we remember those who perished at the hands of the Nazis and those who gave their lives to defend the Jewish state, we must also internalize the forward-looking message as well. In addition to prayer and charity, we must honor their sacrifice by doing our utmost to ensure the security of Israel.

By increasing our understanding of the issues affecting the U.S-Israel relationship, every one of us can help shape policy and opinion. Many opportunities exist to increase our political and historical knowledge, allowing us to build meaningful relationships with members of Congress. In order to do so we must increase our understanding of the issues critical to Israel's survival. We must be constantly aware of the challenges facing the Jewish state, whether [Hizballah](#) on her northern border, [Hamas](#) on her southern border, or [Iran](#)'s pursuit of nuclear weapons. We must also be able to lobby our members of Congress to ensure that Israel maintains her qualitative military edge, and express how a strong Israel benefits the United States. A good way to keep abreast of current events in Israel is by frequently reading Israeli newspapers online and checking the "Today's Briefing" section of AIPAC's website. For more on how you can get involved in pro-Israel advocacy, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

This year, we must do more than simply remember, we must also hear the call to action of the Yizkor prayer. As we vow to never forget the victims of the Holocaust, and honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for Israel's defense, we must also vow to take the necessary steps to ensure a strong U.S.-Israel relationship for the future. ■