

JUNE 4, 2012

Parashat Beha'alotecha

Kindling the Light

When you light the lamps (Numbers 8:2)

בהעלותך את הנרות (במדבר ח:ב)

The word *beha'alotecha* (when you light) is derived from the word *aliyah* (to rise), conveying a connection between the kindling of the lamps and spiritual ascent. The Midrash notes, "Said Rabbi Berachia HaKohen: This flame is the offspring of the divine flame in heaven, and it shines light upon the entire world...Said God: Do I require your light? Why then did I say to you [to kindle the *Menorah*]? I did so in order to elevate you, as it is written, *beha'alotecha* [i.e.—"when you elevate yourself]." The light of the *Menorah* became a primary motivating ideal of the Jewish nation. The prophet Isaiah (49:6) described the Jewish people as a source of light when he said, "I will also give you for a light of the nations, that My salvation may be to the end of the earth."

God commanded the Jewish people to serve as a source of light, morality, spirituality and inspiration for the world. From its founding, the state of Israel has devoted itself to this mission and has emerged as a light unto the nations.

Israel is a vibrant country that stands out as a leading force for good and inspiration around the world. In just 60 years, the Jewish state has become a model of innovation, creating new technologies that have improved the quality of life and cured millions of people of various diseases. Israel is on the forefront of cancer research working with colleagues in the United States and throughout the world in the quest to cure cancer. Along with that, Israel has provided disaster and humanitarian assistance to countless nations. The Jewish state is a member of the exclusive Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and has hundreds of companies listed on Nasdaq. Israeli scientists have developed genetically modified, disease-resistant bananas, peppers and other crops that are expanding the world's food supply. Moreover, Israel has also set a national goal to increase its share of renewable energy in electricity generation to 10 percent by 2020. In the same period of time, Israel plans to reduce its electricity consumption by 20 percent. The country's expertise, technology, humanitarian assistance and defense strategies are utilized by countries on every continent. For more on Israel's achievements, click [here](#).

The *Menorah*, which is also enshrined on the seal of the state of Israel, represents the Jewish people spreading their light around the world. Just at the divine light that Aaron kindled elevated humanity, by sharing its experience, technologies and know-how with others, Israel has improved the lives of millions of people worldwide. ■

Spurring Trouble

And the children of Israel also wept (Numbers 11:4)

ויבכו גם בני ישראל (במדבר יא:ד)

The text describes the events that prompted the people to complain about a lack of meat to eat in the desert. The verse states that, "The mixed multitude that was among them cultivated a craving, and the children of Israel also wept once more, and said, 'Who will feed us meat'" (11:4)? Kli Yakkar, noting that the text specifically states that the nation "also wept" explains that "from this we can derive that the *erev rav* (mixed multitude—see Exodus 12:38) began to cry initially, and they caused the children of Israel to cry together with them." It began as the yearning of the mixed multitude and soon spread until it threatened the well being of the entire camp.

Just as the mixed multitude's desire for meat in the desert quickly spread to the entire camp, Iran's desire to achieve nuclear weapons capability will similarly spread to other nations, sparking a new, perilous nuclear arms race.

A nuclear Iran would pose many threats to America, including the risk that other neighboring countries, threatened by Iran's dangerous power, would initiate their own nuclear arms programs. This would spur a regional nuclear arms race as Arab nations pursue their own capabilities. This heightened interest in nuclear technology would likely spread beyond the Middle East, marking the death knell of the global non-proliferation regime. Many Arab states, including the UAE, Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, have already begun or indicated their intention to begin "peaceful" nuclear programs as well—taking first steps toward their own nuclear weapons capabilities. [Haaretz](#) recently reported that should Iran acquire nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia would follow suit. According to former senior U.S. diplomat Dennis Ross, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah explicitly warned the U.S. that if Iran obtains nuclear weapons, "we will get nuclear weapons." The article states that Ross responded to the King's assertion with a lengthy appeal against nuclear proliferation, but Abdullah repeated the same line: "If they get nuclear weapons, we will get nuclear weapons." For more on the threat of Iran, click [here](#).

Simply by expressing their craving for meat, the mixed multitudes were able to spread their dangerous desire to the entire camp. If Iran acquires nuclear weapons, its yearning will similarly spread to other countries, sparking a regional arms race which will pose a direct threat to both Israel and the United States. ■

Feeling Their Pain

Let her not, I pray, be as one dead (Numbers 12:12)

אל נא תהי כמת (במדבר יב:יב)

When Miriam is afflicted with *tzara'at* for speaking slanderously about her brother Moses, Aaron appeals to Moses to pray for Miriam's immediate recovery. "Let her not, I pray, be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb" (12:12). Why does Aaron refer to a mother's womb? Rashi (on 12:14) explains: Aaron told Moses that their sister's sickness, "is as if half of our flesh is consumed," meaning that as siblings to Miriam, her suffering was theirs as well because of the unique connection they share. Rabbi Shalom Meir Valk (See Ma'ayan Hashavua, Vol. IV, p. 149) notes that from Rashi's comment we learn that when an individual is in distress, we are instructed not only to pray for them, but also to share in their burden and feel their pain.

Aaron not only prayed for Miriam's recovery, but shared in her suffering. Today, concerned people around the world are feeling the pain of innocent Syrian civilians, who continue to suffer at the hands of a brutal Assad regime.

A massacre of 108 civilians, half of them children, ignited a world outcry. U.N. observers said that 13 bodies had been discovered bound and shot in eastern Syria, [Reuters](#) reported. The mass killings in the Syrian town of Houla prompted a host of Western countries to increase the pressure on Syria. Turkey joined the United States, Britain, France and Germany in expelling Syrian diplomats in protest at the Houla massacre, saying international measures would follow if crimes against humanity continued. Yet, despite continued international calls for the ouster of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, the violence in Syria continues unabated. In response to the humanitarian crisis, Israeli President Shimon Peres wrote on his [Facebook page](#) that, "For over a year now in front of our eyes men, women and children are being murdered by a cruel dictator. His only aim is survival. Two days ago this murder reached a horrific peak. We cannot look; it is so difficult to see the tiny coffins of young children. Every situation has political considerations but it will be a disaster if political considerations provide cover for the bloodshed of children. We have reached the limit when humanity can tolerate massacres such as these. Condemnations, once again, will not help." For more on Syria, click [here](#).

The Syrian civilians continue to endure violence from their dictatorial president. Just as Aaron reminded Moses that in order to truly help someone in distress, you must first be able to feel their pain, the world must feel the pain of the innocent victims suffering under the Syrian regime. ■