



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 25, 2013

Shabbat Chol Hamo'ed Pesach

Determination

For they are a stiff-necked people (Exodus 34:9)

כי עם קשה עורף הוא (שמות לד:ט)

After achieving forgiveness for the people following the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses stated, “Let the Lord, I pray Thee, go in the midst of us; for it is a stiff-necked people” (24:9). How is a “stiff-necked” nation an argument in the peoples’ favor? Rabbi David Weiner explains that Moses argued on behalf of the Jews’ tenacity. “If the Israelites as a people are so tenacious about maintaining their ancestral ways, argues Moses, then once they figure out the whole monotheism/Jewish worship idea, they are never going to let go of it... Being stiff-necked, it turns out, is both something to regret on Yom Kippur and something to celebrate about our people’s culture and character.”

Moses recognized that while we can at times be a stubborn people, our tenacity is also our greatest trait. It is this determination that has been critical in bolstering America’s positive view of the state of Israel.

ABC News and *The Washington Post* recently released a [poll](#) that gauged Americans’ sympathies in the Middle East conflict. The results indicated overwhelming American support for the Jewish state. According to *Haaretz*, the poll shows that 55 percent of Americans sympathize with Israel. This strong support doesn’t happen on its own. It’s the result of the determination of pro-Israel supporters who consistently advocate for the Jewish state in numerous ways. In addition to communicating with our legislative officials to ensure a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, we must also remember the importance of standing up for Israel in other arenas as well. Whether it’s a letter to the editor of a newspaper following a slanted news report, responding to a biased or ill-informed comment on a popular website or even just promoting Israel in a conversation at work, our determination to stand with Israel produces tangible, critical results. When American elected officials see their constituents advocating for the Jewish state, they will boldly voice their support as well. For more on how you can make an impact, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

Moses cited the nation’s tenacity as he argued for a stronger relationship between God and the Jewish people. We must continue to harness this critical national trait to ensure that the U.S.-Israel relationship remains strong. ■

A Vision of Hope (Haftarah)

Dry bones: Hear the word of the Lord! (Ezekiel 37:4)

העצמות היבשות: שמעו דבר ה' (יהזקאל לד:ד)

On Shabbat Chol Hamo'ed of Passover we read perhaps the most famous passage of consolation from Ezekiel (Chapter 37)—the prophecy of the “dry bones” (the namesake for the [famous Israeli cartoon](#)). The prophet relays a divine vision; a pile of dry bones is reinvigorated and returns to life. The prophet promises the Jewish nation, which had endured terrible suffering and persecution, “Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.” Many commentators, including Rashi and Radak, view the passage as an allegory to Israel’s future rise from the ashes. The Israeli Jewish studies scholar Chen ben Eliyahu writes that “the return to Zion, Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel—they are the actualization of the vision of the dry bones—they are the wondrous ‘resurrection of the dead’ of the nation of Israel.” It is also fascinating to note that Israel’s national anthem, Hatikvah, in which we declare “Our hope is not lost,” is a direct response to the people’s lament in the prophesy that, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost” (37:11).

Many commentators have viewed Ezekiel's moving prophecy of the resurrection of the dry bones as an allegory to Israel's future. Perhaps he foretold of the wondrous innovations and advancements that have come out of Israel today.

During President Barack Obama's recent visit to Israel he toured the Israel museum and got a first-hand look at the Dead Sea scrolls, tangible evidence of the ancient link between the Jewish people and the Holy Land. At the museum he also viewed a forward looking exhibit intended to give the President a different view of modern-day Israel. The exhibit called "Israeli Technology – For a Better World" highlighted seven products developed in Israel, chosen for their degree of innovation and impact on humanity, [NoCamels](#) reported. The exhibit included a robot snake, a headset that enables computers to be controlled by brainwaves or facial movements, a new type of battery that will expand the range of electric vehicles, as well as a "robot waiter" developed by students from Haifa. Israel's National Information Directorate head Liran Dan said that in addition to emphasizing the deep connection between the U.S. and Israel, "we would also like to present to the world the products of the future that originate in Israel and which will be used in many places around the world." Click [here](#) for speeches, videos and more from the president's trip to Israel. For more on the amazing Israeli innovations, click [here](#).

As we read about Ezekiel's vision of redemption and resurrection, we must also marvel as we witness the famous ancient prophecy actualizing before our eyes through the amazing achievements that have come out of Israel. ■

Missed Opportunities (Song of Songs)

My beloved had turned away, and was gone (Song of Songs 5:6)

דודי חמק עבר (שיר השירים ה:ו)

In the fifth chapter of Song of Songs the lover related a tale of missed opportunity. While her beloved knocked on the door, hoping she would awaken and open the door for him, she lingered in bed saying, "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them (5:3). Finally, she jumped out of bed to open the door for him, "but my beloved had turned away, and was gone" (5:6). Rabbi Ya'akov Nagen notes that *chametz* (leavened bread) is related to the word *lehachmitz* (to miss an opportunity). During Passover, we must rid ourselves of our *chametz* and grab every opportunity. If we wait too long, the opportunity may be lost forever.

The tragic missed encounter described in the Song of Songs reminds us of the importance of taking action before an opportunity passes. The world must internalize this critical lesson as it grapples with Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Many of President Barack Obama's diplomatic talks during his recent trip to Israel focused on the growing nuclear threat from Iran, which continues to defy international demands to halt its development of nuclear weapons. At a joint news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, Obama said he preferred to deal with the Iranian nuclear threat in a diplomatic manner. "We prefer to resolve this diplomatically and there is still time to do so," he said. But he also insisted that "all options remain on the table" and added that a "nuclear armed Iran would be a threat to region, the world, and an existential threat to Israel," [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. According to [Voice of America](#), while Netanyahu agreed with Obama's assessment regarding the one-year timeframe to actually build a nuclear weapon, he said he believes that if Iran "gets through" the enrichment process, it will reach an "immunity zone"—a reference to a situation in which military action would not be able to stop it. We must encourage the Obama administration to fully implement and strongly enforce the biting sanctions the President and Congress have already put in place, to further tighten the economic vise crippling Iran's economy. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

As Song of Songs reminds us, we must seize an opportunity, for if we miss it, who knows if it will ever happen again. The economic sanctions placed upon Iran represent the best opportunity to peacefully resolve the Iranian nuclear threat. That is why it is critical that more crippling sanctions be imposed on the regime in an effort to persuade Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment program. ■