



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 18, 2013

Parashat Tzav/Shabbat Hagadol & Passover

On Guard (Tetzaveh)

And keep the charge of the Lord (Leviticus 8:35)

ושמרתם את משמרת ה' (ויקרא ח:לה)

During the week-long inauguration of the Tabernacle, Moses commanded Aaron and his sons to remain in the Tabernacle for the entire seven days of the service telling them, “and keep the charge of the Lord” (8:35). Translated literally the phrase means, “and you shall guard the safeguard of the Lord.” Why did Moses refer to the priests as guards? King David in Psalms (121:4) wrote that the Guard of Israel, “neither sleeps nor slumbers,” teaching us that a guard’s post cannot be left. Because the priests remained in the sanctuary without interruption, their steadfast vigilance transformed them into guards of the holy Tabernacle.

Because of their willingness to protect the Tabernacle, Moses referred to the priests as guards. Today, the American and Israeli militaries work year round to help ensure that both countries are protected from a variety of threats.

The United States, Israel and Greece recently concluded a two-week long joint naval exercise in the Mediterranean Sea. According to [JTA](#), this operation, named “Noble Dina,” was a scheduled annual exercise for Israel’s navy and is part of the security cooperation between the Israeli Navy and foreign naval forces. The exercise represents one of many coordinated security efforts between the two nations, who work together to defend both countries against foreign military and terrorist threats. Each year, various branches and levels of both countries’ militaries hold numerous joint training exercises in the United States and Israel, where they learn from one another and train for combat situations in diverse geographical locations. From phone calls between senior defense officials at the Pentagon and their counterparts in Tel Aviv, to the development of new technology to bolster both militaries—not a day goes by without critical American-Israeli military engagement. For more on the U.S.-Israel military partnership, click [here](#).

Like the priests who guarded the Tabernacle, Israeli and American service members work together and stand guard, ensuring the safety and security of citizens of both countries. ■

A Natural Partner (Shabbat Hagadol)

The great and awesome day of the Lord (Malachi 3:23)

יום ה' הגדול והנורא (מלאכי ג:כג)

Why do we call the Shabbat before Passover “The Great Shabbat”? Eliyahu Kitov (See Book of Our Heritage vol. 2 p.155) offers a Midrash (Bereishit Parashah 11) as a source: “Said Shabbat to the Holy One: To each [day] you gave a partner, yet to me you did not give [a partner]. Said the Holy One [to Shabbat]: the Children of Israel will be your partner.” On the Shabbat before the Exodus, when the Jews defied the Egyptians by setting aside the Paschal lamb for slaughter, the Nation of Israel was effectively born, and could now “connect” with Shabbat, its natural partner. The Midrash refers to Shabbat and the Jewish people as a partnership because of the shared goal of bringing holiness and sanctity to the world. The day Shabbat found its true mate was truly a “Great Shabbat.”

Shabbat Hagadol, which celebrates the shared connection between Shabbat and the Jewish people, reminds us of the powerful benefit of natural partners joining together in pursuit of a common goal. We see this same kind of partnership between the United States and Israel.

President Barack Obama's first official visit to the state of Israel is scheduled to run from March 20 to March 22. The president's trip plans to include visits to the Shrine of the Book, Yad Vashem, a special museum exhibit highlighting Israeli technology, as well as laying a wreath at the grave of former Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin. The visit will also include high-level talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Prior to the trip, the president referred to his visit as a listening opportunity and noted that there would not be a big Middle East peace initiative. According to [The Jerusalem Post](#), U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro said, "The visit to Israel by U.S. President Barack Obama sends a key message of support not only to Israel and the U.S. public, but also to others who see the warmth of the relationship between the two nations." In an effort to further strengthen the bond between the two countries, members from both parties in both houses of Congress have authored [The United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2013](#), legislation that enhances cooperation between the United States and Israel and designates the Jewish state a "major strategic partner." This legislation seeks to dramatically strengthen the relationship between the two allies as they work to confront new threats and challenges in the Middle East. The bill will expand cooperation in a variety of arenas, and include enhancements in cooperation in the military, trade, energy and homeland security spheres. We must urge our Senators and Congressman to co-sponsor this bill, in order to build upon President Obama's visit to Israel and continue to strengthen the ties between the United States and Israel. To take action, click [here](#).

On the Great Shabbat, we celebrate the power that can come when forces for good joining together. Let us dedicate ourselves to strengthening both America and Israel by enhancing the bond between the two democratic nations. ■

Dangerous Dictates (Passover)

And our toil—this refers to the sons (Passover Hagaddah) ואת עמלינו – אלו הבנים (הגדה של פסח)

During the Passover *seder* we note that the biblical allusion to "our toil" (Deuteronomy 26:7) refers to the murder of Jewish children. Yet, Pharaoh alone could never have implemented his plan to subjugate and enslave the Israelites. Instead, he turned to ordinary Egyptian citizens to carry out the law on his behalf: "Pharaoh charged all his people saying, 'Every son that is born you shall cast into the river'" (Exodus 1:22). The calamity that ensued for the Jewish people is just one example from history that demonstrates how catastrophic it can be when a government charges ordinary citizens with enforcing harsh dictates.

As we remember the method that Pharaoh used to suppress the Israelites, we must be wary lest new changes in modern Egypt lead to similarly horrific outcomes.

While the overthrow of the Mubarak regime in Egypt initially sparked hopes of the spread of tolerant democracy in the Arab world, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power has instead emboldened the most radical elements of Egyptian society. [The Los Angeles Times](#) recently reported that Islamist extremist groups like the Salafis, which include militants fighting for an Islamic caliphate in the Sinai Peninsula, have seen their influence grow in recent months. "Uncompromising Salafi leaders, such as Mohammed Zawahiri... would crush liberal tendencies, shrink a woman's space in public life and counter what he sees as generations of manipulation by the West." The development is especially troubling in light of a new official call from the Morsi government "encouraging Egyptian civilians to arrest lawbreakers and hand them over to police." According to [Time](#), "A senior leader of a hard line Islamist faction loyal to President Mohammed Morsi said his group was preparing lists of volunteers ready to take over police duties if needed." Opposition leaders viewed the suggestion of citizen arrests "as a prelude to the substitution of the police by militias belonging to Morsi's powerful Muslim Brotherhood group and allied Islamist groups who swept to power after Egypt's uprising two years ago." For more on Egypt, click [here](#).

Let us pray that these moves of the modern Egyptian government don't lead to results similar to those in the days of Pharaoh. As we celebrate the Israelites' freedom from Egyptian tyranny, we must also work to ensure that Egypt does not become a hotbed of radical Islamic hatred. ■

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