



# Sermon Tidbits

MAY 20, 2013

## Parashat Behaalotecha

### Standing Tall in Self-Defense

**You shall sound an alarm with trumpets (Numbers 10:9)**

**והרעתם בחצצרות (במדבר י:ט)**

“And when you go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets...” (10:9). Why during times of war was the nation specifically commanded to blow from the silver horns and not from a *shofar*? Rabbi Shmuel Borenstein (Behaalotecha 5670) wrote in his classic work *Shem Mishmuel* that while we blow the curved *shofar*, which symbolizes subjugation and submission, during times of repentance like Rosh Hashanah, during times of war we blow the straight, long horns, “because against external enemies we require strength and cannot be submissive—for such an attitude might lead to our defeat at their hands, God forbid.”

The ancient Israelites were commanded to blow the long straight horns to inspire strength and determination. As Israel faces tangible threats to its safety and security, we must also inspire strength by standing tall and protecting Israel’s right and obligation to defend itself.

Israeli planes struck sites outside Damascus twice this month, targeting weapons transfers from Iran to Hezbollah. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah vowed to respond to Jerusalem’s ostensible “aggression” against Syria with the help of Syria’s advanced “game-changing” weapons. Nasrallah warned that the next step would be to open up a front on the Golan Heights, which Iran has convinced Syria to permit. Tehran, seeking to prevent the fall of Syrian President Bashar Assad’s government, asked Damascus if Hezbollah could set up a new military front against Israel in the Golan. “All Arabs and Muslims” are requested to join the fight against Israel, Tehran said, according to Israel Radio. After China expressed concern over the airstrikes on Syria, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu affirmed his country’s right to self-defense, [Bloomberg](#) reported. While visiting the Ohel Moishe Synagogue in Shanghai, which once served 30,000 Jewish refugees during World War II, Netanyahu said, “Today we have a state of our own... We need not beg to be saved. We can defend ourselves.” Commenting on the airstrikes, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney [said](#) Israel is right to be concerned, “The transfer of sophisticated weapons to terrorist organizations like Hezbollah is certainly a concern and a threat to Israel and they have the right to act in their own sovereign interest in response to those concerns.” For more on Israel’s right to self-defense, click [here](#).

The ancient Israelites blew the straight horns to encourage strength and determination. Today, Israel is strong and determined as it protects its citizens and takes the necessary action to defend itself against terrorist groups. ■

### Making Excuses

**We have nothing but this manna to look at (Numbers 11:6)**

**בלתי אל המן עינינו (במדבר יא:ו)**

“And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting” (11:4)—a desire to eat meat—leading them to complain about the fact that all they ate was the *manna* that fell from heaven. Netziv (on 11:6) quoting the Midrash, explains that they did not in fact dislike the taste of the *manna*. Rather, they resented their continued, daily dependence on God for their food. Why then did they complain about the *manna* and ask for meat? Netziv explains

that they were embarrassed to reveal the true motivations for their actions, so “They sought a different excuse and said that they hungered for meat” instead of revealing their true motivation.

Just as the mixed multitude made excuses for why they rejected to eat the *manna*, the Palestinian Authority continues to make excuses and expand its list of preconditions as it refuses to negotiate with Israel.

While Secretary of State John Kerry has been trying to [renew Israeli-Palestinian negotiations](#), Palestinians insist they will not resume talks unless a laundry list of preconditions is met first. A recent interview with a leading Fatah Central Committee member Jibril Rajoub seems to indicate that the preconditions represent an excuse to avoid sincere negotiations with Israel. According to [Yediot Achronot](#), Rajoub said in an interview with the Hezbollah affiliated television network Al Mayadeen that there would not be a return to negotiations without international decisions taken within a limited time frame and with the Israeli promise to freeze all “one-sided” steps related to Jerusalem, the separation barrier, settlements and the release of prisoners. Rajoub is one of several Palestinian leaders who signed the Geneva Initiative, and had stated on previous occasions that he was interested in peace with Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has made clear his commitment to talks and a two-state solution, “Israel remains fully committed to peace and to the solution of two states for two peoples.” Meanwhile, the PA continues to insist on—and expand its list of—preconditions for negotiations. It has demanded settlement freezes, prisoner releases, a map of final borders, and promises to refrain from ever withholding tax revenues as requirements merely to begin talks—rather than as key topics for discussion as part of the actual negotiations. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

The mixed multitudes’ desire for meat was an excuse to avoid acknowledging their lack of faith. For years, the PA has demanded that Israel accede to preconditions before negotiations could resume. These demands seem to represent an excuse to avoid sincere talks with the Jewish state. ■

## Free Speech

**My lord Moses, shut them in! (Numbers 11:28)**

**אדני משה כלאם (במדבר יא:כה)**

Following the sin of the mixed multitudes, Moses complained that he could not lead the people alone. He was instructed to choose 70 elders who would experience the divine spirit and then share the burden of leadership with him. Yet, after The Cloud of Glory lifted, while the 70 elders’ prophecy ended, Eldad and Meidad continued to prophesize, leading Joshua to insist, “My lord, Moses, shut them in!” (11:28). Why did Joshua want to silence the two prophets? Rashi (on 11:28) explains that Joshua actually wanted Moses to imprison the two prophets because he didn’t like their message, as they prophesized that, “Moses will die and Joshua will lead Israel into [the Land of] Canaan.” Moses, to his credit, refused to silence them, and allowed them to speak freely and openly.

While Eldad and Meidad’s message challenged Moses’ leadership, he nevertheless honored their right to speak freely and openly. Today, the state of Israel follows in Moses’ footsteps, working hard to guarantee freedom of the press.

The state of Israel remains a unique sanctuary of democracy and freedom in the Middle East, protecting its citizens’ rights while upholding the progressive values it shares with America. Israel has a robust free press with myriad publications representing all views within its society; hundreds of foreign journalists are free to report on every political and diplomatic development. Civil rights are guaranteed by law, and guarded by citizen action groups that openly challenge the government. Israel is considered to be the most advanced and tolerant country in the Middle East on such matters as the guarantee of a fair trial and the protection of minority rights. It is also the leading nation in the region in the protection of gay rights, with strong anti-discrimination laws. Furthermore, it maintains an independent judicial and court system. In Israel, nobody is above the law. For more on Israel today, click [here](#).

Just as Moses protected the prophets’ right to speak freely, the state of Israel has, since its inception, protected the democratic rights of its citizens and members of the press to speak freely and openly. ■

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