

SEPTEMBER 2, 2013

Parashat Ha'azinu & Shabbat Shuvah

How Far We've Come (Shabbat Shuvah)

Return O Israel (Hosea 14:2)**שובה ישראל (הושע יד:ב)**

Teshuvah—repentance—requires us to look back, reflect and evaluate our actions over the past year. Only when we stop and reflect can we appropriately commit to change in the future. That reflection can also be inspiring as we acknowledge how far we've come and the positive changes we've achieved. The Sages ascribe great power to repentance, noting that it can literally transform an individual, a community, or even a nation. According to the Talmudic Sage Reish Lakish, “*teshuvah* is so great that one's sins are transformed into merits” (Yoma 86b). When we truly change for the better, we transform ourselves into new, different people. In this way, the mistakes of the past serve as building blocks for a better future.

On Shabbat Shuvah, as we reflect on our personal behavior, we can also look back and examine our American Jewish history and see the ways that our hard work has strengthened our communal voice and helped keep Israel safe.

In late 1943 the horrors of the Holocaust were becoming clearer to a shocked and devastated American Jewish community. Almost exactly 70 years ago—on October 6, 1943—three days before Yom Kippur, in the hopes of convincing the American government to take action to stop the Nazi atrocities, [400 American rabbis](#) gathered in Washington, D.C. and attempted to meet with President Roosevelt. History records that the President never took the meeting. Thankfully, today America is a different place. With the lessons of history etched upon us the Jewish community has learned how to effectively engage our leaders and policymakers. When we as a Jewish community come together we are no longer ignored. We have learned to exercise our rights, indeed our responsibility in a democratic society, to get involved in the political process and work with members of Congress to spearhead [initiatives](#) that are making the world a safer, more secure place. Seventy years ago the Jewish community was ignored by the president; now presidents regularly come to address the pro-Israel community at the annual [AIPAC Policy Conference](#). But, we cannot rest on our laurels. Iran is still working tirelessly to develop nuclear weapons. Israel still requires American aid to maintain its security. We must still strengthen strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel. As a community we should take pride in the advances we have made, remember the lessons of 70 years ago, and redouble our efforts to support a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

Seventy years ago the world was a different place; we didn't have the internet, we didn't have color TV and we didn't have a politically strong American Jewish community. On Shabbat Shuvah, as we look back on our history, we can take pride in how far we have come and commit to working even harder for a better future. ■

The Gentle Nudge

Like an eagle that stirs up her nest (Deuteronomy 32:11)**כנשר יעיר קנו (דברים לב:יא)**

Moses compared the experience of the revelation at Sinai to “an eagle that stirs up her nest” (32:11). Rashi (on 32:11) explains that when the eagle wants to feed to her young, she hovers above the nest instead of landing upon it in

manner that might harm her young until they have garnered sufficient strength to hold her weight. Similarly, the people of Israel were guided “with compassion...when [God] came to give the Torah, He did not appear to them from one direction, but from four” so that the people were not overwhelmed by the experience.

The Jewish people were led in the desert with care, lest the burden of their new identity overwhelm them. Today, as the United States looks to help the Egyptian government move forward, it should follow the example of the eagle and hover gently, giving Egypt the time to strengthen itself.

Following the overthrow of the Morsi government at the hands of the Egyptian military, many Americans called for the United States to reevaluate its annual aid package to Egypt. Yet, while the United States must repudiate the use of violence against unarmed protesters, it must also carefully calibrate its response to the events in Egypt, and maintain the important relationship that it has cultivated with Egypt over the past 30 years. According to the [Associated Press](#), Tamara Cofman Wittes, who served as deputy assistant secretary of state from 2009 to 2012, said that “The White House needs to develop a long-term strategy to nudge a military-run Egypt in a democratic direction.” State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki echoed those sentiments when she said that “We still believe there is a window of opportunity for the Egyptian people to return, to move toward a path to sustainable democracy. We still feel that that’s in the best interests of the Egyptian people and that it’s possible.” Egypt represents a crucial ally to the United States, offering American ships priority in the Suez Canal and American flights access to its airspace. Most importantly for those of us care about Israel, Egypt maintains the peace treaty with Israel and stability along its border with the Jewish state. For more on Egypt, click [here](#).

Like the eagle that takes care to give to her young in a compassionate and sensitive manner, as the United States looks to influence the developing government in Egypt it must do so with care and sensitivity. ■

The Fruit of the Field

And he did eat the fruit of the field (Deuteronomy 32:13)

ויאכל תנובת שדי (דברים לא:יג)

The poem of Ha’azinu describes the great kindness that God would bestow on the Jewish nation once they reached the Promised Land. Moses declared, “He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he did eat the fruitage of the field” (32:13). What was unique about these fruits? The Midrash (Sifrei) explains, “These are the fruits of the Land of Israel, which are lighter to eat than the fruits of any other land.”

The wondrous biblical description of the beautiful fruits that grow in the Land of Israel still rings true. Israel is now not only known for its oranges and wine, but also for the olives that are the basis for world-class olive oil.

While Israel’s vineyards have been garnering accolades for years now, few are aware of the growing Israeli olive oil industry. [Israel21c](#) reported that Zohar Kerem, a food chemist specializing in olives at the Hebrew University’s Institute of Biochemistry, Food Science and Nutrition, outlines several factors that contribute to the quality of Israeli olives. First, most Israeli olives are irrigated with salty and purified wastewater, which not only preserves critical water resources, but also adds natural fertilizers to the soil and does not compromise the fruit’s quality. Second, harvesting is completed within the ideal window of October to December, as opposed to many other countries where the process continues long after olives are past their prime. Finally, Israeli growers do not store the fruit for long before extracting the oil, producing fresher, tastier, higher quality oil. Hilla Wenkert, an international olive-oil judge said, “The world is full of Italian, Spanish, Greek, Turkish, Moroccan and Tunisian olive oil, but most of it is lower quality because many people cannot afford the good stuff.” Israeli extra virgin olive oil rates as the “good stuff” for which consumers are willing to pay more. For more on Israel today, click [here](#).

Moses said that the fruits of the Land of Israel did not compare to the fruits of any other land. Israel’s modern olive oil industry is just another example of the miraculous fruits of the land that Moses described three thousand years ago.

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