



Sermon Tidbits

MAY 19, 2014

Parashat Bamidbar

The Power of the Personal

Take the sum of all the congregation (Numbers 1:2)

שאו את ראש כל עדת... (במדבר א:ב)

Commentators wonder about the purpose of this additional counting, when the people had already been counted just six months prior, following the sin of the Golden Calf. Rabbi Yitzchak Caro, in Toldot Yitzchak (Bamidbar 1:5) explains that the goal of this new count was entirely personal. “He wished to count the heads of the households and families out of a love for them...for each person was counted by Moses and Aaron...” By counting the nation personally, Moses and Aaron lifted the spirits of the entire nation, giving each family a feeling of significance and importance, as the leaders of the nation met and counted each and every household.

Moses personally counted the entire nation to establish a connection to each household. Today, the power of personal involvement remains the most effective tool to ensure a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

This November, Americans will once again visit their polling places for mid-term elections for all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, 36 Senate seats, 36 governorships as well as dozens of state legislatures and local offices. Without an accompanying presidential campaign, midterm elections often suffer from a lack of passion and energy on the part of the electorate, and usually generate lower turnout than presidential elections. Yet, perhaps for this reason, these midterm elections represent a critical opportunity for the pro-Israel community to create meaningful personal relationships with our elected officials.

Because we in the Jewish community care so deeply about the safety and security of the state of Israel, and because of our ability as Americans to participate in the political process, we have a special opportunity and responsibility to educate elected officials, policy makers, and opinion leaders. We must take advantage of this opportunity by engaging in the political process, supporting the candidates of our choice—both with our votes and our dollars—and in building deep, personal ties to the candidates. Our involvement now, when candidates truly need us, will pave the way to a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

By counting the people personally, Moses highlighted the unique power of personal involvement. This year, our involvement in the up-coming elections will enable us to continue to strengthen the U.S.-Israel partnership. ■

Fighting by Proxy

In the wilderness of Sinai (Numbers 1:1)

במדבר סיני (במדבר א:א)

Moses counts the nation – *l'tzivotam*, normally translated as “by their hosts”. Yet, the subsequent text makes clear that the count also organizes the nation into a *tzava* – an “army.” Rabbi Simcha Raz (Shivim Panim L'torah vol. 3 p. 14) notes that the formation of this Israelite army represented a fundamental shift away from every previous military model. “It is almost certain that this represents the first time in human history that an army was established for and by an entire nation—not slaves, or paid mercenaries...rather an army of an entire nation, from age twenty to sixty.”

Rather than hire or force someone else to fight for them, the people of the Jewish nation were drafted to defend themselves. In contrast, today, Iran hires others not to defend itself, but to do its dirty-work, threatening millions of lives across the Middle East and around the world.

The [Jerusalem Post](#) recently reported that in its annual country-specific report on terrorist activity, the U.S. State Department found that “Iran continues to arm Hezbollah in Lebanon, and proxies elsewhere around the world, despite engaging in direct talks with world powers over its expansive nuclear program.” According to the report, “Iran’s state sponsorship of terrorism worldwide remained undiminished...through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, its Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and Tehran’s ally Hezbollah, which remained a significant threat to the stability of Lebanon and the broader region.” [Politico](#) reported that State Department Counterterrorism Coordinator Tina Kaidanow told reporters that American officials worry about Iran’s support for the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad. It has both supplied his forces directly in the deadly campaign against rebels there and deployed fighters from Hezbollah to help them. “The report makes clear we still have deep concerns about Iran’s use of proxies, including Hezbollah, terrorists as well as its support to Assad,” Kaidanow said. In addition, with funding from Iran, Hezbollah continues its relentless efforts to commit acts of terrorism against Israelis around the world, and maintains an arsenal of tens of thousands of rockets pointed at Israel’s northern region.

As the United States negotiates with Iran over its nuclear program, it cannot lose sight of the fact that Iran pays Hezbollah and others to murder and commit acts of terror on its behalf. ■

The City of Connection – Yom Yerushalayim

Jerusalem that is built as a city... (Psalms 122:3)

ירושלים הבנויה כעיר (תהלים קכב:ג)

The Psalmist refers to Jerusalem as a city that is *chubrah yachdav* – “compact together” (Psalms 122:3) The Midrash notes that these words also refer to a greater connection – *chibbur* – implied in the city’s name. According to the Jerusalem Talmud (Chagigah 21), this means that Jerusalem is a city, “that turns all of Israel into friends (*chaveirim*).” Today, this notion of the connectedness of Jerusalem has taken on additional meaning, following the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967. Today, Israel’s capital is the city that not only unified Jewish people, but whose unification represented the reconnection of Judaism’s most sacred city to *Am Yisrael*.

As we celebrate the reunification of Jerusalem this coming week, we thank the U.S. Congress for recognizing that the united city of Jerusalem is, and should always remain, the capital of Israel.

Jerusalem is a unified and open city and the capital of the state of Israel. From 1948 until 1967, Jerusalem was divided. No Israeli of any faith, or any Jew of any nationality, was permitted access to the eastern part of the city, including the Western Wall—Judaism’s holiest site and the heart of the Jewish people’s more than 3,000-year connection to the Land of Israel. Today, people of all faiths—Jews, Muslims and Christians—are free to move and reside anywhere in Jerusalem. While American presidents have never formally recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital or located the U.S. embassy there, Congress has acknowledged an undivided Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. The 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Act declared that it was American policy that Jerusalem should remain undivided as Israel’s capital and the U.S. should move our embassy to Jerusalem. However, successive presidents have used the statute’s national security waiver to avoid relocating the embassy. Congress has also passed numerous resolutions stating that Jerusalem “is and should remain the capital of the State of Israel.” Last month, the [New York Times](#) reported that, “The [U.S.] Supreme Court... agreed to decide whether Congress may require the State Department to treat Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in American passports,” in accordance with a law enacted by Congress ordering the State Department to “record the place of birth as Israel” in passports of American children born in Jerusalem if their parents asked.

As the State of Israel celebrates the reunification of Jerusalem and the ability of people of all faiths to access the Holy City, we applaud the unwavering support of the U.S. Congress in recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. ■

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