



Sermon Tidbits

JUNE 2, 2014

Parashat Beha'alotecha

A Bipartisan Effort

In front of the candlestick (Numbers 8:2)

אל מול פני המנורה (במדבר ח:ב)

Aaron is instructed to kindle the lamps of the Menorah specifically “in front of the candlestick” (literally, “opposite the face of the Menorah”). Rashi (on verse 2) explains this phrase to mean that Aaron kindled the wicks of each of the six lamps extending from the two sides of the Menorah to be facing the center lamp. S’forno, noting the symbolism of this instruction comments, “This teaches us that the light of those on the right and the light of those on the left is focused and directed on the center lamp, which is the essence of the Menorah.” According to S’forno, the different sides of the Menorah represented different ideologies within the people—the Right and Left. Yet, when each side focused inward towards the same goal, together they created great light for the nation.

S’forno reminds us that when the Right and Left focus on a singular goal they generate great light. Today, America’s political wings continue to generate powerful light in their work together to support a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

For more than 60 years, bipartisan support for Israel has been a hallmark of Congress. Even during periods of partisan divisions in Washington and frequent fluctuations between peace and violence in the Middle East, Congress has been a bastion of cross-aisle backing for Israel. For the past half-century, both major parties’ platforms have featured strong planks affirming the value of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Lawmakers from both parties have voted in overwhelming numbers on numerous occasions to strengthen and increase American support for Israel. Both Republican and Democratic presidents and lawmakers have worked to strengthen the bond between the two allies, a strength which derives from the fact that passionate citizens from both sides of the political spectrum involve themselves in the political process and educate and lobby their elected officials about supporting a strong, free state of Israel. While the United Nations, other international organizations and the governments of many countries around the world often adopt the positions of Israel’s adversaries, Congress standing unified, across the aisle, in support of Israel, provides a critical counterweight to Israel’s detractors.

Aaron taught the nation that when united, it could bring great light to the world. Today, our legislators in Congress prove this point, uniting to bring light to the world through their support for a safe, strong state of Israel. ■

Sharing the Burden

ונשאו אתך במשא העם (במדבר יא:יז) They shall bear the burden of the people with you (Numbers 11:17)

When the nation complains to Moses about their desire for fresh meat, Moses turns to God to complain that, “I am not able to bear this people myself, alone.” (11:14) In response, Moses is instructed to share his divine inspiration with seventy elders, who would share in the burden of leadership. The Midrash (Tanchuma Beha'alotecha 12) wonders: As the elders gained their prophecy from Moses, perhaps the act of sharing his prophecy would diminish Moses in some way? The Midrash rejects this suggestion outright. “To what could Moses be compared at that moment? To a candle placed near a candelabra, where all kindle their lights from it, but its light is not dimmed in any way.”

Just as the people outlined their desires to Moses, and Moses responds by appointing the elders to share leadership, today the American people must demand shared leadership by Congress exercising its rightful and historic oversight role to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

As negotiations with Iran near the imposed six-month deadline, the role of Congress as a critical voice in the process becomes ever more critical. In a recent [op-ed article in the Washington Post](#), Eric Edelman, Dennis Ross and Ray Takeyh argue that including Congress will strengthen America's negotiating position in trying to achieve a lasting deal. They write, “As the negotiations between Iran and the United States enter critical stages, Washington needs to develop a bipartisan consensus about parameters of an acceptable agreement. No such consensus can come about without the two branches of government and the two political parties working together. This will require the White House to take into account Congress’s perspective and heed its warnings. The failure to do so could mean that any agreement negotiated by [President] Obama will not survive his presidency.”

The authors also cite historical precedents in which both Democratic President Harry Truman as well as Republican President Richard Nixon sought both council and support from members of Congress across the aisle. In each case, strong bipartisan backing created the national consensus crucial to creating (under Truman) the United Nations and achieving ground-breaking arms-control treaties (under Nixon).

As with Moses, the assertion of the people's voice, and the resulting sharing of leadership, makes the entire community stronger, decisions clearer and the outcome better. ■

A Trusted Servant

He is trusted in all My house (Numbers 12:7)

בכל ביתי נאמן הוא (במדבר יב:ז)

After Miriam and Aaron speak negatively about Moses, God immediately appears to them to defend Moses’ honor, praising Moses as “trusted (*ne’eman*) in all My house.” (verse 7) What is the meaning of this phrase? Dr. Raphael Yarchi presents two Midrashic explanations. According to Rabbi Akiva, “trusted” implies subordination and obedience. Moses could be counted on to carry out his instructions without fail. Rabban Gamliel disagrees, and explains that trust here implies the independence to act on God’s behalf even without explicit instruction. Great leaders must demonstrate both qualities: unquestionable loyalty and devotion, coupled with independence and personal initiative. By being both, Moses represented the ideal servant of God and leader of the Jewish nation.

The description of Moses as “trusted” implies both obedience and devotion but also trust to take personal initiative. Recently, the United States Congress voted to salute a trusted friend who manifests both important qualities.

Just one month before retiring from his distinguished post as president of the state of Israel and after decades of public service to the Jewish state, Shimon Peres will be awarded the United States’ highest civilian honor (along with the Presidential Medal of Freedom)—the Congressional Gold Medal. Both chambers of the U.S. Congress granted President Peres the acclaimed distinction by unanimous consent, honoring his legacy by underscoring the beneficial influence that the Israeli president has had on the Jewish state and its robust partnership with the United States. The legislation’s sponsors lauded President Peres on his lifetime achievements for the state of Israel and for the U.S.-Israel alliance. “For over 70 years, President Shimon Peres has dedicated himself to the enduring bond that unites Israel and the United States,” said Congressman Joe Kennedy (D-MA). “There has been no greater champion for our shared values and defender of our shared interests.” Kennedy’s co-sponsor, Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ) offered similar appreciation. “President Shimon Peres has embodied a commitment to the mutual values shared by the United States and Israel—values that include the preservation of life, faith, family and freedom,” Franks said.

As a “trusted” leader, Moses demonstrated both devotion but also individuality and initiative in leading his people. For nearly seven decades, Shimon Peres has used those same qualities to defend, protect and lead the Jewish State. ■

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