

SEPTEMBER 22, 2014

## Parashat Ha'azinu – Shabbat Shuvah

### Pure Evil

**Their wine is the venom of serpents (Deuteronomy 32:33)**

**חמת תנינם יינם (דברים לב:לג)**

Describing the adversaries of Israel that would one day oppress and distress the Jewish nation, Moses says that “Their wine is the venom of serpents, and the cruel poison of asps.” (32:33). What does this cryptic phrase mean? According to Ramban (on verse 33), these enemies are so rooted in evil that the fruit and wine they produce only bring death and destruction. “They have not understood, neither apprehended, nor thought of anything but evil continually, for they were of evil root and they grow only evil and bitter fruit—‘he that eats of them will die.’” (see Isaiah 59:5).

The wicked adversaries Moses described thousands of years ago still present a real threat both to Israel and the free world in the form of radical groups like Hamas, whose commitment is to death, terrorism and murder.

Speaking recently, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyah [said](#), “I would like to make something clear: The weapons of the resistance cannot be tied to the reconstruction of Gaza or to any other issue to do with Gaza.” Recently, a Hamas cleric in Gaza emphasized this point when he [gave a sermon in a Mosque while holding a machine gun](#) and declared, “This war has proven that these weapons are our only means to liberate our land...our only means to establish the Islamic state.”

Senators Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) and Bob Casey (D-PA), following last month’s conflict, penned a powerful bipartisan letter to Secretary of State Kerry on the future of Gaza including preventing Hamas from rebuilding its military capabilities. They write that “before the reconstruction of Gaza can begin, the United States and other world powers must ensure that Hamas will not use building materials to re-construct terror tunnels and further advance its terrorist infrastructure as it has done in the past.”

Moses describes an adversary so consumed by evil that it would only produce poison and danger. Today, America and Israel must together confront the radicalism of Hamas, which threatens the safety, security of Israel and the stability of the region. ■

### Fragrant Fruit – Shabbat Shuvah

**And his beauty shall be as the olive-tree (Hosea 14:7)**

**ויהי כזית הודו (הושע יד:ז)**

The prophet Hosea, after exhorting the people to “Return (*shuvah*), O Israel,” then prophesizes of a wondrous future of blessing for the children of Israel. Among the blessings the nation would enjoy was the promise that, “His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his fragrance as Lebanon.” (verse 7) Rabbi Meïr Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Weiser, in his Malbim commentary on the text, explains that the blessing refer to “the children that will be in the end of days...which will grow into wondrous trees that bear fruit [and they are compared to an olive] because an olive gives oil that produces light, so will they emanate the light of God...”

Hosea envisioned a day when the children of Israel's founders would grow into strong trees that produce fruit—in turn spreading light to the world. An Israeli biotech company represents another example of Hosea's vision coming to life.

The Ebola virus is spreading across much of Africa killing more than 1,500 people this year and leaving devastation in its wake. According to [The Times of Israel](#), Protalix, an Israeli biopharmaceutical company located outside of the northern city of Carmiel, said that it has the resources to produce the experimental Ebola vaccine called ZMapp, which has recently run out. Protalix has developed a proprietary molecule which uses a genetically altered tobacco plant to mass-produce badly needed drugs. According to Dr. Yossi Shaaltiel, Protalix's executive vice president of research and development, "We would certainly be happy to have the company producing the Ebola drug have us produce the drug for them. We would know how to do it effectively, in large quantities, and in a relatively short period of time." The World Health Organization says there could be as many as 20,000 cases of Ebola before the outbreak is brought under control, and Protalix may indeed play a critical role in curbing the spread of the dreaded virus.

On Shabbat Shuvah we read of the days when Israelis will produce fruit that bring light to the world. Today, Israelis are fulfilling these prophetic words, saving lives by using modified plants to produce sorely needed drugs. ■

## Acquire for Yourself a Friend

**Acquire for yourself a friend (Pirkei Avot 1:6)**

**רבת דל הנק (תובא יקרפ א:ו)**

During the Ten Days of Repentance, we take time to not only reflect on the wrongs we have committed during the past year and to make amends for them, but also to acknowledge the many blessings we have received. There are few greater blessings than that of a true friendship. Pirkei Avot (1:6) commands us, "Acquire for yourself a friend" and the Talmud (Ta'anit 23a) notes, "either friendship or death."

True friends stick by us in our moments of despair, support us in our moments of struggle and rejoice with us at our happiest occasions. Israel and the United States exemplify such a friendship.

Last week, the Senate passed, the United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act (S.2673) by unanimous consent. This bill will dramatically strengthen and expand the U.S.-Israel alliance as a way to confront new threats and challenges in the Middle East. The bipartisan bill, authored by Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Roy Blunt (R-MO) and garnering a total of 81 co-sponsors, "enhances the strategic partnership between the United States and Israel" and declares that Israel is "a major strategic partner of the United States." It also authorizes cooperative programs with Israel in the fields of energy, water, agriculture and alternative fuel technologies, as well as cooperative homeland security research pilot programs. In March, the House adopted a companion bill (H.R. 938) authored by Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Ted Deutch (D-FL), Ed Royce (R-CA) and Eliot Engel (D-NY), which will now be reconciled with the Senate version before it is sent to the president to be signed into law.

The U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act is a ground breaking legislation that underscores American policy "to reaffirm the unwavering support of the people and the government of the United States for the security of Israel," and "to pursue every opportunity to deepen cooperation with Israel on a range of critical issues." Sen. Blunt said following the bill's passage, "I'm pleased the Senate has passed this bipartisan bill [to reaffirm and broaden](#) the important U.S.-Israel alliance through security, energy and trade during this critical time in the Middle East region."

It is the hardest times that will always reveal the truest of friends. While the wounds of this past summer are only beginning to heal, and life for many of our friends in Israel may never be the same, we should take pride in knowing that America's support for our ally, Israel, will never waver. ■

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