



# Sermon Tidbits

SEPTEMBER 7, 2015

## Parashat Nitzavim

### Standing Together

**You are standing this day all of you (Deuteronomy 29:9)**

**אתם נצבים היום כלכם (דברים כט:ט)**

This week, as Congress reconvened from their summer recess, hundreds of rabbis from across the United States traveled to Washington, D.C., just days before Rosh Hashanah, to lobby their elected representatives to reject the agreement with Iran. At the same time, well over a thousand rabbis spanning the major Jewish denominations from across the country signed a [petition](#) opposing the deal. While it is true that there isn't absolute unanimity on this issue, one can argue that the American Jewish community is more united than some may think. When have hundreds of rabbis from all denominations joined together to sign a petition on anything? The list of major Jewish American organizations opposed to the deal includes: the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee as well as over 50 Jewish Federations across the country. While some differ on whether the proposed deal is the best option to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons capability, there *is* near unanimity that the deal contains many provisions that could ultimately threaten the safety and security of Israel *and* the United States.

Unity represents a core element—perhaps the most important element—critical to the survival and prosperity of the Jewish nation. As Moses commits the nation to a divine covenant before entering the Promised Land, he emphasizes the importance of unity. He first notes the importance of the leaders: “You are standing this day all of you before Adonai your God: your heads, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel.” (29:9) In the very next verse Moses mentions, “Your little ones, your wives, and the stranger that is in the midst of your camp, from the cutter of your wood unto the drawer of your water.” (verse 10) Every individual is critical. Ohr Hachayim notes that Moses establishes this covenant based on the concept of *areivut*—mutual responsibility—and that he specifically mentions these two groups of people to teach us that, “all of them carry this obligation—each according to what he is.” Each of us is responsible for the well-being of the Jewish nation.

Unity also serves as a critical theme as we approach the High Holidays this coming week. Rabbi Kalominus Kalman Halevi Epstein of Krakow, in his well-known Hasidic work *Maor V'shemesh*, notes that unity is also the key to communal repentance on Rosh Hashanah. “It is well known, that an underlying principle and root of *teshuvah* is to unite as one, and to connect in the bonds of brotherly love, and to look at the positive attributes of his friend and how he worships his Creator, and not look at his blemishes. In this manner, he desires to emulate his friend in his positive actions, and will return to the Holy One with all of his heart. This is the meaning of the verse: ‘You are standing today.’ What enables the Nation of Israel to stand before God? It is because you all are [standing] as one: Your leaders, your tribes, your elders and you officers, all the men of Israel.”

The near unity we see in the United States either opposing or raising significant concerns about the Iran deal mirrors a similar unity we see in Israel. Israel is not known for its political unity. Yet, across the political spectrum, Israel's leaders are united against the deal with Iran. The head of Israel's opposition, Yitzchak “Bougie” Herzog, said, “I think it [the Iran deal] is bad for Israel. [Netanyahu and I] will certainly cooperate when it comes to the security of Israel. As an Israeli patriot, this deal is dangerous... [Lifting sanctions will] immediately give Iran a lot of money and resources, which will reach our enemies at our borders. Now Iran is out of the cage and will become a regional tiger.” Yair Lapid, the head of the Yesh Atid party, vowed to, “Continue fighting to the last minute so that the whole world and the U.S. Congress understands that lifting sanctions without changing the issue of inspections would be wrong.”

As 5775 comes to a close and the vote on the Iran deal draws near, it remains critical that we urge Congress to oppose the deal to ensure that the safety and security of Israel *and* the United States won't be threatened by a nuclear capable Iran. ■

## The Miracle of Kibbutz Galuyot

**And gather you from all the people (Deuteronomy 30:3)**

**וקבצך מכל העמים (דברים ל:ג)**

This past June, seventy-eight members of the B'nei Menashe India tribe arrived at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport to settle in Israel. This arrival marked the 3,000<sup>th</sup> member of the tribe to resettle in the Land of Israel. At the welcoming ceremony, Absorption Minister Ze'ev Elkin (Likud) [told the new immigrants](#) that he hoped his own experience as an immigrant from Ukraine could empower the new arrivals. "Twenty-five years ago, when I was only 18 years old, I came to this exact spot and sat exactly like you," the minister recalled. Stories like these remind us that Israel truly is a modern miracle, representing the ingathering of the exiles predicted by Moses in Parashat Nitzavim.

At the conclusion of his final address to the nation before his death, Moses tells the people that following the "blessing and the curse" (30:1) which would befall the Jewish people, "then Adonai your God will turn your captivity and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples...and Adonai your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it..." (30:3-5) This oath comprises the notion of the ingathering of the exiles, which has been a cornerstone of Jewish prayer and yearning for millennia. Even today in the daily *Amidah* we pray that God, "Sound the great Shofar for our freedom, raise the banner to gather our exiles and gather us together from the four corners of the earth." Noting the double language of "return" (in verse 3), Netziv in *Ha'amek Davar*, makes a startlingly accurate comment: "After God will return the main exile from among the nations, God will then return to gather from the nations 'from where Adonai has scattered you' (verse 3) slowly and gradually."

In the modern era, we have watched the state of Israel represent the actualization of Moses' promise to ingather the exiles. According to Israel's [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), "The essence of Israel's development has been Aliyah, immigration of Jews from dozens of countries on every continent speaking over 100 different languages...After half a century of independence, the various immigrant groups that make up Israel's society have agreed on their commitment to the state's essential values: a Jewish state in its ancient homeland, democratic governance, ongoing immigration and the attainment of peace with its neighbors. Together with this, ethnic diversity is very much a part of Israel's society, affecting all aspects of its cultural, religious and political life." Moreover, [Ha'aretz reported](#) that according to a recent OECD study, "67.1% of [Israel's] population are either immigrants or have one parent who was." Also, the unemployment rate for immigrants is *lower* than the rate for native-born Israelis. And, while 13 percent of immigrants to Europe felt discriminated against, that number in Israel was just 4.7 percent.

Recently, Israel's Diaspora Affairs Ministry [formed a committee](#) to "reach out to develop relations with groups that have Jewish ancestry or ties," including not only the Bnei Menashe in India, but also groups with Jewish ancestry in Poland, Spain, South America and elsewhere. In his address to the Indian immigrants Elkin told them, "You have gained back your tradition. I wish you a successful absorption, and wish you that, in 25 years' time, perhaps a minister of absorption from the Bnei Menashe will stand here and welcome new immigrants." Each group that arrives as part of the ingathering of the exiles represents yet another step in building the miracle that is the modern state of Israel. ■

---

Sermon tidbits are intended for your use without attribution. Please feel free to use some or all of the material. Although it is not necessary, it is appreciated if copies of sermons or articles that use the ideas presented here are sent to [synagogue@aipac.org](mailto:synagogue@aipac.org).