



# Sermon Tidbits

JUNE 20, 2016

## Parashat Beha'alotecha

### Working Together to Spread Light

In front of the candlestick (Numbers 8:2)

אל מול פני המנורה (במדבר ח:ב)

Aaron was commanded to light the candles of the menorah in the Tabernacle, “in front of the candlestick”—literally: “opposite the face of the menorah.” Rashi (verse 2) derives that Aaron was instructed to light each lamp “in front of the middle lamp, which is not in the branches but in the body of the candlestick.” The menorah had seven lamps consisting of a center staff and three arms on each side. According to Rashi, Aaron was commanded to light each lamp on the sides facing the center staff. Why was he commanded to light the menorah in this manner? Seforno explains that this unusual commandment was meant to convey the importance of unity to the entire nation. He writes, “This teaches us that the light of the right-wingers and the light of the left-wingers is focused and directed to the light of the middle staff, which is the essence of the menorah.” In Seforno’s time, the right-wing referred to those engaged in the “eternal life” of spirituality, while the left-wing represented those engaged in the “temporal life” of work and sustenance. Rather than competing with and antagonizing one-another, Seforno exhorted both groups to recognize that each worked towards the same goal of spreading the light of the menorah—and that both groups depended on each-other to achieve that lofty goal. He wrote that their aim “Should be to spread the will of God in a manner that God’s will be achieved among all of them and they elevate God’s name together...In other words, together we will complete [God’s] will.”

Seforno’s powerful words resonate strongly today, especially in the United States. With our two political parties’ nominees all but decided, the heated political rhetoric threatens to dangerously divide our country. As supporters of a strong U.S.–Israel relationship, this antagonism between the right and left threatens to weaken the bedrock of strong support that Israel enjoys from both political parties.

The value of bipartisan support for the U.S.–Israel relationship—where members of both political parties come together in support for the Jewish state—has been the engine that has powered the pro-Israel movement for decades. Despite their significant differences, senators, congressmen and presidents have been able to put partisan disagreements aside in their desire to provide the critical support that has protected Israeli lives and advanced American interests in the Middle East. Over just the past month, hundreds of members of the Senate and House, from both political parties, have supported initiatives to quickly finalize a new long-term Memorandum of Understanding for military assistance to Israel. Members of the House in a strong bi-partisan vote recently passed the 2017 Defense Appropriations bill which included more than \$600 million for U.S.–Israel missile defense programs. Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee passed their Defense Appropriations bill for next year, which also includes more than \$600 million for U.S.–Israel cooperative missile defense programs, in a 30-0 bipartisan vote. The appropriations process is a multi-step process and the House and Senate will now need to reconcile their bills into a final version.

Each of us is understandably passionate about the coming election, for it will shape the future of the United States in fundamental ways. Yet, while we can and must articulate our political preferences, we must also recognize that Israel’s security depends upon our recognition of Seforno’s critical lesson: We need the support of both sides—the left and the right—to ensure Israel’s continued strength and security. We must continue to focus on the center of the menorah and the essence of our critical mission, and recognize that, as Seforno wrote, “Together we will complete [God’s] will.” ■

## Constant Readiness

And whenever the cloud rose (Numbers 9:17)

ולפי העלות המשכן (במדבר ט:יז)

In Israel, readiness is actually part of the cultural lexicon. As the majority of Israel's population serves in the military reserves, every Israeli instinctively knows that should an emergency situation arise, he or she could expect to receive an emergency call-up order known as a "*tzav shemoneh*." The *tzav shemoneh* has become so ingrained in society that Israelis might refer to any emergency situation as a "*tzav shemoneh*" as in, "Last week's soccer loss is a *tzav shemoneh*, so all fans must come out and support our team tonight!" Israelis live in such a constant state of readiness that they've assimilated the language of readiness into their daily lives.

This need for constant readiness was part of daily life for the Children of Israel in the desert. Parashat Beha'alotecha includes a rather unique section that describes the unusual travel schedule of the Children of Israel in the desert. Rather than following a specific schedule, the Cloud of Glory that guided the people left them little ability to plan for the future. "And whenever the cloud was taken up from over the Tent, then after that the children of Israel journeyed...And sometimes the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle...And sometimes the cloud was from evening until morning...Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, abiding thereon, the children of Israel remained encamped, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up, they journeyed." (Numbers 9:17-22) Sometimes they camped for a year, while other times they camped for just a few hours. The text describes the sporadic nature of their travel in the desert in great detail, for the Children of Israel were willing and ready to follow the cloud even at a moment's notice. Rabbi Zalman Baruch Melamed writes that the story teaches us that, "One had to live a life of readiness; to not be surprised by a change of plans; whatever the Holy One commanded—they immediately hurried to carry out."

IDF officers constantly stress this need for continual readiness to the soldiers serving on Israel's northern border. According to the [Jerusalem Post](#), in January 2015, following a reported Israeli air strike on a convoy of Hezbollah and Iranian operatives who were constructing a terrorist base in the Syrian Golan, Hezbollah retaliated, firing a volley of Kornet guided missiles from a distance of five kilometers at the IDF, killing a soldier and commander. The attack forced IDF commanders to reevaluate its level of preparedness on the Northern border, and has led to a significant improvement in readiness, for both routine border security missions and emergency escalation situations.

While the border with Lebanon may seem quiet, on the other side of the fence Hezbollah continues to add missiles, weapons and soldiers armed with the real-world combat experience gained by fighting in the Syrian Civil war. Iranian-backed Hezbollah poses a direct threat to American interests and Israel, as it dominates the Lebanese government and now has an advanced arsenal of more than 150,000 rockets—which it stores primarily in schools, mosques, hospitals and communities—giving it the ability to attack all major Israeli population centers at a moment's notice.

Because of this threat, Israel's advanced missile defense systems—including Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow 3—developed with support from the United States are more critical than ever. Cognizant of this, the U.S. House of Representatives significantly bolstered its support of U.S.-Israel missile defense cooperation in the fiscal 2017 defense appropriations bill. The House appropriated \$635.7 million for U.S.-Israel missile defense programs, which will help Israel be prepared to defend its citizens against rocket and missile threats. Because of our efforts, Israel knows that if, or when, Hezbollah unleashes another round of missiles, American assistance will protect the lives of innocent Israelis through recently developed missile shield technology and provide the means for Israel to defend itself. ■

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