

OCTOBER 10, 2016

Parashat Haazinu – Sukkot

The Challenge of Wealth – Ha'azinu

Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked (Deuteronomy 32:15)

וישמן ישרון ויבעט (דברים לב:טו)

The eighteenth-century Eastern European scholar Rabbi Moses Sofer (commonly referred to by the name of his major work, *Chatam Sofer*) once spent time as a house guest of a member of the Rothschild family who was not only a wealthy man but also very pious. [Rabbi Eliyahu Safran relates](#) that as Sofer was preparing to leave he was asked by his host, “Please tell me if there is any aspect of my household which is not run according to Torah thought.” And then, to demonstrate his determination to be as pious as possible, he added, “If so, I will immediately rectify the situation.” Sofer pondered for a moment and then replied, “Everything that I see within your household is contrary to Torah thought.” The pious philanthropist nearly collapsed, for he was aghast at this response. Before his response could cause his host any more concern, Sofer smiled and explained the meaning of his seemingly harsh comment based on this week’s Torah reading.

In the poem that comprises the majority of Parashat Ha'azinu, Moses predicts that, “Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked.” (Deuteronomy 32:15) Rashbam explains that the literary device refers to an animal, who after being fattened by his owner and now secure in his newfound energy and vitality, kicks the very owner who fed him. Similarly, Moses predicts that after the Jewish nation gains material wealth and prosperity, it would then reject the God that had blessed them with their wealth and turn instead to idolatry. This phrase has come to represent the danger of material wealth, and the possibility that once blessed with prosperity a person might grow “fat” and use his wealth for self-gratification and fulfillment. In this light, the Chatam Sofer said to Baron Rothschild: “[Moses predicts that] when the Jewish people accrue wealth, they will rebel. Your home, however, is clearly an exception to this prophecy. You have passed the test of plenty. God grant that all those who are prosperous follow your example.” Wealth and prosperity is of course a great blessing, but also presents a spiritual challenge: Does our wealth turn us inward, towards ourselves and our own needs or do we rise to the challenge and use that wealth to not only improve ourselves, but those around us as well?

As a country facing similar questions, Israel has chosen to use newly found resources not only to benefit itself, but to strengthen ties with its neighbors in the region. Last year, Israel finally approved the development of the Leviathan well, its second major Mediterranean natural gas depository. To its credit, Israel has worked to use this resource not only to augment government income, but also as an anchor of regional peace and stability. Last month [Forbes reported](#) that, “A group of producing partners operating in Israel’s Leviathan reservoir have agreed to provide natural gas to Jordan over a 15-year period, moving on long-gestating efforts to expand energy trade between the two countries. According to local Israeli media reports, Jordan’s National Electric Power Company Ltd. will receive a total of 45 billion cubic meters of natural gas as a part of the agreement over the next decade and a half.” Israel’s Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz (Likud) [praised the deal](#) as “an extremely important national achievement. This is an important milestone in strengthening the ties and strategic partnerships between Israel and Jordan and the entire region.”

As we learn from the wealthy and pious Rothschild family, wealth and prosperity comes with an obligation to not only improve oneself but to help those in need. Ultimately, Israel is learning that with its newfound wealth of resources comes the ability and the obligation to not only help its citizens, but make a safer, more secure Middle East in the process. ■

Temporary Dwellings – Sukkot

You shall dwell in booths (Leviticus 23:42)

בסכת תשבו (ויקרא כג:מב)

When a [rocket landed in the streets of Sderot](#) last week, many of us did not give the news item a second thought, if we even heard about it at all. Thankfully, the rocket fired from Gaza City landed in the middle of an open street, leaving no physical injuries, although three Sderot residents, including a fifteen-year-old girl and a sixty-year-old man suffered anxiety attacks. Once again the rocket siren activated, reminding residents in the battered southern city that danger could, at any time, be just moments away. While Israel's southern residents resumed their daily lives shortly after the attack, they were reminded that they may soon be forced to leave their homes during the next military operation in Gaza. This Sukkot, as we leave our own homes for the temporary dwelling of the Sukkah, this act takes on a new meaning in light of the suffering of Israel's southern region.

The Sages defined the Sukkah that we sit in over Sukkot as a “temporary dwelling.” Commenting on the verse, “You shall dwell in booths for seven days” (Leviticus 23:42) the Talmud (*Sukkah* 2a) notes that, “The Torah tells us: Throughout the seven days [of Sukkot] you must leave your permanent dwelling and sit in a temporary dwelling.” By its very definition, a Sukkah must be a temporary dwelling—built *not* to last. If one builds a Sukkah that is too tall, or constructs the roof out of solid material, the Sukkah is rendered invalid. The defining element of the Sukkah is its transitory nature. Many commentators explain the essence of the Sukkah as spiritual in nature. After we have achieved atonement for our sins at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, we leave the safety and relative comfort of our permanent homes as a demonstration of faith, and the recognition that our blessings come from God. Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshitz (See *Sefer Hamoadim on Sukkot* p. 42) writes that this self-imposed exile imbues in each of us the recognition that the entire world is, in a sense, temporary and that we must always turn our head to the Heavens.

Last month, the [Israeli Newspaper NRG reported](#) that representatives of Israel's Home Front Command instructed residents living within four kilometers of the Gaza Strip that the IDF will declare the region a “closed military area” during the next conflict with Gaza. While the IDF has insisted that it will not force residents to leave their homes, several months ago it sent a letter to each resident in the area surrounding the Gaza Strip asking residents to, if necessary, “lock their doors, close their shades and windows, and to prepare a bag of clothing” should the need for immediate evacuation arise. The IDF fears “a significant attempt to attack or even conquer a civilian settlement through the penetration of tens of terrorists through tunnels. In such a situation, the fact that most residents would not be present would allow the IDF to increase the breadth of its action and possible military responses.” Last June, the U.S. Department of Defense and the Israeli Ministry of Defense announced an agreement to enhance collaboration on counter tunneling research and development. The agreement represents the implementation of a multi-year congressional initiative to fund cooperative anti-tunneling programs with Israel. In addition, Congress last year designated \$40 million for a new, joint U.S.-Israel anti-tunneling program—to help develop technologies to locate, map and destroy terrorist tunnel networks.

As we can see, our efforts have already had a profound impact. Yet, the threat from Hamas continues to grow. They continue to smuggle weapons into the Gaza Strip, while also rebuilding their arsenal of rockets and mortars. As we speak, an estimated 1,000 Hamas workers are rebuilding the attack tunnel network and diverting materials provided by the international community to rebuild Gazan citizen's homes and civilian infrastructure to use for terrorist activity. As we joyously leave our homes this holiday for the temporary spiritual dwelling of the Sukkah, we must remember the threat facing the thousands of Israeli residents living within range of Hamas' terrorist reach around the Gaza Strip, and commit ourselves to do everything within our power to ensure that the Jews of Sderot feel as safe and secure in their homes as we do in ours. ■

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.