



Sermon Tidbits

SEPTEMBER 19, 2016

Parashat Ki Tavo

Giving Thanks for our Success

And you shall rejoice in all the good (Deuteronomy 26:11)

ושמחת בכל הטוב (דברים כו:יא)

Last Wednesday, at the U.S. State Department in Washington, D.C., Jacob Nagel, the acting national security adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Shannon, signed a new Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Israel. By signing this agreement America provides Israel with the largest defense aid package to any country in history. According to the [New York Times](#) the new agreement, “will provide an average of \$3.8 billion a year over the next decade to Israel...including financing for missile defense systems that defend against rockets fired by groups like Hezbollah and Hamas.” The [Times of Israel](#) reported that Nagel, speaking at the event, said that the, “unprecedented funding would strengthen the remarkable alliance between the United States and Israel and provide the Jewish state with a necessary military edge over its regional adversaries.”

We must rejoice in the knowledge that the United States remains fully committed to Israel’s safety and security, and we must also give thanks. First and foremost, we must give thanks to the people of the United States, who truly identify with and support the state of Israel, and who appreciate the importance of American military support for Israel. We must also thank President Obama and his administration for forging this landmark agreement, along with our elected representatives, who have echoed bipartisan support for Israel in the halls of Congress. We then must thank the many thousands of supporters of Israel from across the country who invest their time, energy and resources in support of the Jewish state. And finally, as we are reminded in the first section in Parashat Ki Tavo, we must thank God as well.

The opening paragraphs of Parashat Ki Tavo convey the mitzvah of *Bikkurim*—First Fruits—which requires the farmer to bring the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering. There, he must also recite the *Mikra Bikkurim*—the First Fruits Declaration—in which he offers a special prayer of thanks for the bounty of a blessed harvest. In this prayer, the farmer briefly reviews the suffering of the Jews during the centuries of slavery in Egypt and the subsequent Exodus and redemption at the hand of God. The prayer concludes, “And God has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which You, O Lord, have given me.” (26:9-10) Rabbi Ari Kahn, in his work “Echoes of Eden,” [writes that](#) in this prayer, “We recall a time and place when we were threatened, and our very survival was uncertain. This display of historical consciousness is designed to give context to our current success. Our hard work has paid off, but it was built on the experiences of the past; moreover, when contrasted with the hopelessness of the past, our current success is that much sweeter.” This success we do not simply express through prayer, but with an act of giving the first of those fruits—the most special and precious fruits—to God.

The mitzvah of *Bikkurim* teaches us that the greatest thanks to God that we can give for last week’s success is to continue to give. We must recommit ourselves to yet another year of hard work. The Memorandum of Understanding has been signed, which is a great feat, but efforts to delegitimize Israel continue. The Iranian threat to both Israel and the United States will only grow over time and terrorist groups surrounding the Jewish state continue to prepare for the next military engagement. Our excitement and satisfaction at the success of our hard work must motivate and inspire us.

This great achievement demonstrates just how much the pro-Israel community can accomplish—and has accomplished. It reminds us that the U.S.-Israel relationship is strong, and is only getting stronger, thanks to the diligent work and unrelenting passion of Americans who support the state of Israel. And finally, it reminds us that there is much more that we can achieve, as we work to ensure that Israel never has to face its daunting challenges alone. ■

Fighting Terror by Isolating Terrorists

They shall flee before you seven ways (Deuteronomy 28:7)

בשבעה דרכים ינסו (דברים כח:ז)

The Israel-Syrian border received a sudden jolt last week when Syrian militants fired a number of projectiles that fell on the Israeli side of the border in the Golan Heights. [Ynet reported](#) that three mortars fell in Israel only twenty four hours after a Syrian rocket fell on open Israeli territory close to civilian areas near Kibbutz Ein Zivan. During the previous evening, Syrian forces fired two surface-to-air missiles at IDF warplanes responding to yet another rocket attack from Syrian territory, leading Syrian military officials to [falsely claim that they had “shot down”](#) the Israeli warplanes. Thankfully, the claims were completely false, and the pilots returned to their base safely. Yet, in response to the growing tensions, “the IDF conducted a civilian evacuation drill in the western Galilee region.” Today, Hezbollah fighters stationed in Syria and Lebanon present a very real danger to Israel, as they threaten Israel’s northern citizens. While the threats are real, there is an effective way to help Israel address the Syrian threat, if the United States continues to follow advice alluded to in this week’s parashah.

While Parashat Ki Tavo is generally known for an extended section called the *Tochecha*, in which Moses outlines the horrible curses that would befall the Israelites should they abandon the path of the Torah, we must also read that before Moses outlines the curses he describes the wonderful blessings the nation would enjoy if it adhered to the proper path. Among the blessings that the nation would enjoy is that, “The Lord will cause your enemies that rise up against you to be smitten before you; they shall come out against you one way, and shall flee before you seven ways.” (Deuteronomy 28:7) What causes a nation’s adversaries to flee in seven different directions? According to Kli Yakkar, enemies scatter in different directions when they suffer from disunity. In his commentary on Deuteronomy 20:1, he writes that, “When there is peace among [Israel’s] enemies, then war [against] them is exceedingly dangerous...but when their hearts are divided and they are not in one connected group, the danger is not as great...[this is the meaning of the verse] ‘They shall flee before you seven ways.’ While Israel’s adversaries may initially act in unison...when their hearts become divided, all seven nations will flee in a different direction.”

In that light, one of the most effective ways to combat Hezbollah may be to isolate it from the international community, reducing the terrorist group’s effectiveness, making it more difficult to wage war in Syria and against the Jewish state. Thankfully, the United States has been working hard to disarm Hezbollah, and those efforts have begun to bear fruit.

The United States has long included Hezbollah on its list of terrorist organizations, limiting financial access the terror group had to American business interests around the world. Last year, faced with the prospect of an Iranian financial windfall following the nuclear agreement with Iran, members of Congress from both sides of the aisle passed the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015, which [President Obama signed into law](#) in December of last year. The legislation imposed “tougher sanctions on banks that knowingly do business with the organization,” and forced banks around the world to choose between doing business with Hezbollah or with the United States.

We must continue to press our elected representative to push the issue of isolating Hezbollah, and ensure that the United States is strongly enforcing the sanctions already in place. Our efforts to isolate the terrorist group have weakened Hezbollah not only financially, but have also reduced its ability to fight in Syria, reducing the danger the group poses to the people of Israel. ■

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