



# Sermon Tidbits

AUGUST 29, 2016

## Parashat Reeh

### Bad Choices

**A blessing and a curse (Deuteronomy 11:26)**

**ברכה וקללה (דברים יא:כו)**

After a screening of Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz's film, "The Case for Israel," in October of 2011 at the Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Anti-Semitism (YIISA), an audience member pointed out that eighty percent of families in Gaza rely on foreign aid. [Dershowitz exclaimed](#), "Why? They had an opportunity, Israel left. There were greenhouses. There were opportunities to develop an economy, the fact that they're all on goddamn [sic] welfare really shows something. They're in refugee camps. That's all self-induced. Be self-reliant. Build a state. Work instead of going out and making rockets. I'm not feeling sorry for people that rely on the United Nations. Build a state. Do something right." Sadly, in the ensuing years since Israel disengaged from the Gaza Strip, the terrorist regime Hamas has come to power. Rather than taking Dershowitz's advice, they have made the diametrically opposite choices by digging tunnels, building rockets and mortars and diverting money from its own citizens to fund its terrorist activities.

Making good choices represents Moses' core message at the opening of Parashat Re'eh: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you shall listen to the commandments... And the curse, if you shall not listen to the commandments..." (Deuteronomy 11:26-28) Moses explains that each of us must choose to follow the path of righteousness and growth rather than choose sin, for there will be inevitable pain that follows a sinful life. In his warning to the nation, Moses presents the choice in the present tense: "I set before you this day," when in fact he had transmitted the Torah to the people years before. Noting this fact, the Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna (see *Parparaot L'torah Vol 5 p. 90*) explained that Moses speaks in the present tense to convey the fact that we face this choice between good and evil every single day, at every moment, and we must struggle to make the proper choice at all times. Life presents us constant opportunities to make good choices and reap their rewards, but also the opportunity to choose unwisely and suffer the consequences. This Shabbat we recite the prayer marking the new month of Elul which begins on Sunday, when we will sound the Shofar for the first time in anticipation of the High Holiday season. This is the time for us to begin contemplating the choices we have made over the past year, as we initiate the process of *teshuvah*, so that we will make better, more productive choices.

Israel also made a choice, eleven years ago when it unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in the hope that separation from the Palestinians would bring a measure of quiet in Israel's south. Tragically, rather than using the greenhouses Israel left behind to grow crops and build a viable economy, Hamas chose to dramatically escalate the conflict, kidnapping IDF soldier Gilad Shalit and firing thousands of Quassam rockets and mortars onto Israeli civilian areas. These and numerous other acts of terror and aggression forced Israel to take defensive actions to prevent Hamas from its stated goal of destroying the Jewish state. Last week, Hamas [fired yet another rocket into Sderot](#), the largest Israeli city neighboring the Gaza Strip. Commenting on the rocket attack, Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman [said that](#), "Seventy percent of their [Gaza's] tax revenue goes to building up military power and re-arming. They don't want to take care of their citizens; they only want rockets and tunnels."

Israel has long sought peace with the Palestinians, and has chosen to make great sacrifices, including the disengagement from Gaza, to promote peaceful coexistence in the region. As long as Hamas continues to choose the painful path of terrorism, violence and murder, peace will remain an elusive dream. ■

## Brotherly Love

**The place that He will choose (Deuteronomy 12:5)**

**המקום אשר יבחר (דברים יב:ה)**

---

While Moses refers to the building of the Temple a number of times in Parashat Re'eh, (see 12:5 “to the place which the Lord your God shall choose...” and 12:11 “the place which the Lord your God shall choose...”) the Torah never explicitly defines the precise location where the Temple was to be built. A popular legend about two brothers is told in a number of anthologies (See *Shivim Panim L'torah Vol. 5* p. 98) and describes how the Temple Mount came to be the chosen location. According to the legend, long before the construction of the Temple, two brothers lived and farmed on that site, one married with a large family, while the other single. When harvest time arrived, the brothers were blessed with a bountiful crop and separately piled up their grain for long-term storage. The unmarried brother, observing his good fortune, thought to himself that God had blessed him with more than he needed, whereas his brother and his large family could surely use more. So, he arose in the middle of the night and secretly took from his grain and put it in his brother's pile. The married brother considered himself so fortunate to have children, for they would care for him in his old age, while his brother could only depend on what he had saved. So he too, arose in the middle of the night and quietly transferred grain from his pile to his brother's. Each morning the brother's arose to find that the piles remained unchanged. So the brothers repeated their secret act of giving each night for several nights, until one night the brothers bumped into each other. Recognizing what they had done for one-another, they fell into each-other's arms in a loving embrace. According to the legend, God selected the site for the Temple on account of the brotherly love demonstrated on the mountain.

While academic scholars debate the authenticity of the legend, it has gained a strong foothold in Jewish lore and culture, and the ideals underlying this beautiful story—brotherly love, self-sacrifice and care for one another—represents core ideologies fundamental to the mission of the both Jewish people as well as the people of the United States. In fact, this story serves as a wonderful parable to describe the symbiotic relationship between the U.S. and Israel.

For many years, America has expressed its brotherly concern by ensuring Israel's Qualitative Military Edge, which represents America's commitment to Israel's military superiority over its adversaries in the region. Usually, this commitment is expressed in military equipment and supplies critical to Israel's security, yet, America supports Israeli military training as well. This year marks the second consecutive year of the Jewish state's participation in a joint realistic aerial combat exercise. During the exercise, the largest and best war simulation exercise in the world, fighter jets simulated combat involving coalition forces at the Nellis Air Force base in Nevada. Remarkably, according to [Haaretz](#), Israeli pilots flew alongside counterparts from several other nations, including two countries—the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan—with which Israel does not have official diplomatic relations,

And Israel reciprocates that love, as our nation struggles to deal with a natural disaster, Israel is proving itself to be a stalwart ally. The torrential downpour in Baton Rouge, Louisiana has been considered to be the worst natural disaster to hit the U.S. since Hurricane Sandy devastated New York City in 2012. There have been more than 13 deaths attributed to the flooding so far, and over 60,000 homes have been affected by the flooding in the state. IsraAid, Israel's international aid organization, is [sending volunteers](#) to help and assist the communities in Louisiana ravaged by recent flooding. They will help Louisiana residents return to their homes to collect personal effects, and help to begin the process of rehabilitating flooded out homes so that the Louisianans' lives that have been affected by the flooding can go back to normal.

While each action represents only a tiny fraction of the ongoing coordination between the United States and Israel, like the two brothers who shared their grain out of concern for one-another, Israel and the United States share critical knowledge, intelligence and technology out of mutual concern for the safety and well-being of both nations. ■

---

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).