



Sermon Tidbits

SEPTEMBER 18, 2017

Parashat Ha'azinu – Shabbat Shuvah

Removing Bans (and Boycotts)

All of the oaths (Yom Kippur prayer)

כל נדרי (תפילה של יום הכיפורים)

Over the summer, North Carolina became the twenty-second state in America to enact anti-BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) legislation, [JTA reported](#). The bill, which easily passed the State Senate and House of Representatives and was signed by Governor Roy Cooper in late July, would bar the state from doing business with companies that boycott Israel. “This bill makes it clear that the State of North Carolina stands with Israel, which has long been an important trading partner of North Carolina,” said Carin Savel, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Raleigh-Cary. This and the many similar bills passed around the country send the clear message that Americans from *both* political parties will stand strong to protect Israel against pernicious boycott efforts. According to [Ynetnews](#), Israelis are doing their part in the fight against a movement that U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May declared to be “little more than a campaign of anti-Semitism directed against Israel.”

Next Friday evening we will gather together on the eve of Yom Kippur for the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. This awesome day begins classically with the Kol Nidrei service. This moving prayer is actually about annulling oaths. During the prayer we declare, “All vows we are likely to make, all oaths and pledges we are likely to vow, or swear, or consecrate, or prohibit upon ourselves between this Yom Kippur and the next Yom Kippur, we publicly renounce. Let them all be relinquished and abandoned, null and void...” As we enter into the Day of Atonement we renounce our oaths out of concern that we perhaps forgot a commitment we had made during the year and failed to live up to our word. How can we ask God for forgiveness when if we ourselves didn’t keep our own promises? Rabbi Elijah Kitov (*Book of Our Heritage Vol. 1* page 100) notes that the rabbis’ focus on vows was “motivated by the fact that the Torah regards the sin of speech as graver than those of action.” Among the list of possible vows is *charamei*—“consecrations.” We don’t make consecrations, but we do recognize the Hebrew form of this Aramaic word—*charamot*, which is the modern Hebrew word for “boycotts.” This week, as we recite the Kol Nidrei and protect ourselves from the destructive speech uttered throughout the year, we must also recommit ourselves to fight the damaging and harmful boycotts, which continue to threaten the Jewish State.

In 1977 and 1979, Congress added provisions to the Export Administration Act (EAA) that prohibits Americans engaged in interstate or international commerce from complying with foreign governmental boycotts of friendly nations. The Israel Anti-Boycott Act of 2017 ([H.R. 1697](#) and [S. 720](#)) would extend these rules to also prohibit compliance with new, similar boycotts of Israel initiated by international government organizations. This bill would bar Americans from joining in boycotts by international organizations against companies doing business in Israel, and would push back against the Anti-Israel bias so acute in the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC). While the bill has broad bipartisan support, we cannot take its passage for granted, especially in light of claims that the bill violates free speech—which it [does not](#). We must make our voices heard and ensure that Congress passes this important legislation, which will significantly weaken a boycott movement that threatens Israel’s continued economic growth and prosperity. During these Ten Days of Repentance, as we focus on the danger of destructive speech, we have the opportunity to use our power of speech to weaken the harmful *cherem*—boycott, aimed at the people, businesses and State of Israel. ■

Hanging in the Balance

Return O' Israel (Hosea 14:2)

שובה ישראל (הושע יד:ב)

Over the first two weeks of September, the IDF's Northern Command conducted a massive drill involving tens of thousands of soldiers from all branches of the army, simulating a war with Hezbollah, the [Jerusalem Post reported](#). The two-week-long drill included physical actions and maneuvers by foot soldiers, land vehicles, naval vessels, helicopters and planes, as well as computer models. Named after former Mossad head Meir Dagan, the drill simulated a missile attack followed by an incursion of Hezbollah soldiers into Northern Israel, including the contingency of evacuating communities close to the Lebanese border. According to [Newsweek](#), the exercise, the first of its scope in over nineteen years, "is described as a response to a 'significant threat to the IDF and especially the home front' from an enemy that is 'developing greatly in warfare, learning and understanding combat.'" In other words, Hezbollah's increased presence and growing strength has Israel seriously concerned, feeling the need to prepare for an inevitable conflict with a well-armed, well-equipped terrorist militia.

Today is called Shabbat Shuvah—"Shabbat of Repentance", named primarily after the first words of the prophet Hosea (14:2) which we read in the Haftarah: *Shuvah Yisrael*—"Return O' Israel..." Rabbi Abraham Gamaize notes that this Shabbat takes on an additional sense of importance and urgency. In the introduction to his book, "*Zamir: The Singing Bird*" he writes that, "Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur the Sabbath is called Shabbat Shuvah, the Sabbath of repentance. The righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life, the wicked are immediately inscribed for death. The majority are between, hanging in the balance for ten days—the Ten Days of Repentance." Most of us consider ourselves neither overly righteous nor wicked. We must see ourselves as "hanging in the balance" giving us an extra sense of urgency as we prepare ourselves for Yom Kippur.

This precarious sense of "hanging in the balance" is clearly a fact of life for Israelis living in the north. Since the conclusion of the Second Lebanon War in 2006 Israel has watched Hezbollah rebuild and considerably increase its missile arsenal in Lebanon. In addition, the six-year civil war in Syria, with its terrible toll on human life and destruction of the Syrian country, has also significantly bolstered Hezbollah's strength and given it a foothold on Syrian territory that borders with Israel. This raises for the first time a potential war with Hezbollah on two fronts across Israel's entire northern border, giving Israel an understandable feeling of insecurity.

We *must* feel that same sense of urgency. While Israelis do their part, we must do *ours*. Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) have introduced [a bill](#) into the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee to cut off the flow of resources to the terrorist group Hezbollah. The measure targets foreign governments that knowingly provide significant financial support to Hezbollah and foreign individuals and companies that aid its fundraising or recruitment activities, building on the Hezbollah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015—unanimously passed by Congress and signed by former President Obama. We must urge [our representatives](#) to support and cosponsor the Hizballah (sic) International Financing Prevention Amendments Act of 2017 ([S.1595](#)). Israel clearly recognizes the threat that Hezbollah represents and is taking action to prepare itself for the future. We must do our part to give the Jewish State every possible advantage when the lives of its citizens are hanging in the balance. ■

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