

OCTOBER 9, 2017

Shemini Atzeret-Bereishit 5778

Fake Concern in the Form of a Blacklist – Shemini Atzeret

On the eighth day (Numbers 29:34)

ביום השמיני (במדבר כט:לד)

We derive the name of today's holiday, Shemini Atzeret, from the verse in Numbers (29:34), "On the eighth day it shall be an *atzeret* to you." What is the meaning of the word *atzeret*? The Sages in the Midrash suggest that it is a derivation of the word *atzor*, meaning "to stop" or "to hold back." Thus, the phrase teaches us that God asks the Jewish nation, which had spent the seven days of Sukkot in Jerusalem for the festival pilgrimage, to "hold back" from leaving and stay an additional eighth day. Why were we being asked to stay? Rashi (in his commentary on 29:34) quotes the Talmud in *Sukkah* (55b), "Throughout the days of the festival they brought offerings symbolizing the 70 nations, and when they came to leave, the Omnipresent said to them, 'Please make Me a small feast, so that I can have some pleasure from you [alone].'" Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov (*Book of Our Heritage Vol. 1* p. 209) quotes a parable in a Midrash that illustrates this point. "The matter may be likened to a king who celebrated a holiday. His servants came and honored him; the members of his household came and honored him. A matron hinted to them: while he is engaged with you, ask your needs of the king. So does the Torah hint to Israel: Ask your needs. For this reason, the Torah kept them back one more day—the eighth day."

We spend the High Holiday season occupied with the needs of the entire world. On Rosh Hashanah, we note in our prayers that the entire world stands in judgment. On Yom Kippur, we pray for atonement not only for ourselves but for the collective sins of humanity. On Sukkot we continue this theme, praying for rain and prosperity for the entire world, and, in ancient times, offering seventy sacrifices in the Temple for the seventy nations of the world. Finally, when the time comes for the holidays to conclude, we dedicate one day for ourselves. Shemini Atzeret thus sheds light on our values and priorities throughout the rest of the year. We spend one day asking for our own needs, because we spend the rest of the year focusing not only on ourselves, but on the rest of the world.

At face value, this focus on others seems to be reciprocated by the international community. While Israel focuses on the rest of the world, today the world focuses on Israel. But the similarities stop there. All too often, international focus on Israel stems not from genuine concern and a desire to help, but instead from a desire to attack and delegitimizing the Jewish state.

Every day, Israel faces unfair criticism from the United Nations, international organizations, and activists that seek to stigmatize, delegitimize and isolate the Jewish state. From the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to the broader Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, Israel is under assault. Last week, the [Times of Israel reported](#) that the United Nations Human Rights Council has actually begun to take action, building a blacklist against companies doing business in disputed territories. "Senior anonymous Israeli officials told the Haaretz ... that U.N. human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein sent letters to some 150 Israeli and overseas companies, threatening to add them to its blacklist of firms operating in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights." This past June, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley condemned the blacklist as "the latest in this long line of shameful actions" taken by the UNHRC. Haley warned that the United States could withdraw from the 47-member body unless it reformed, ended its built-in procedural mechanism to condemn Israel, and banned notorious human rights violators from serving on the council.

We too can take action by [urging our members of Congress](#) to cosponsor The Israel Anti-Boycott Act (H.R. 1697 and S. 720), which would expand U.S. anti-boycott laws to international governmental organizations like the United Nations and the European Union. We must send a powerful message that the United States will not stand by while the United Nations, under the guise of concern, builds a blacklist specifically intent on causing great harm to Israel's economy and security. ■

The Mark of a Murderer - Bereishit

And the Lord set a sign for Cain (Genesis 4:15)

וישמ ה' אות לקין (בראשית ד:טו)

While much of the world's attention is focused on the Iranian nuclear program, and the questions of whether Tehran is fully complying with the terms of the JCPOA, we can't afford to overlook the Islamic Republic's malign behavior throughout the region. Nowhere is this more evident than in Iran's ongoing support for Hizballah, a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organization that has killed more Americans than anyone other than al-Qaida.

Parashat Bereishit chronicles the first murder in human history—the killing of Abel at the hands of his brother Cain. When confronted with his terrible act, after first denying knowledge of the event (“Am I my brother's keeper?”), Cain ultimately accepts responsibility for his crime and is punished with banishment—“a fugitive and a wanderer shall you be in the earth.” (4:12) In accepting his punishment Cain tells God, “My punishment is greater than I can bear...I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth; and it will come to pass, that whoever finds me will slay me.” (4:14) To alleviate this fear of retribution, we read that, “And the Lord set a sign for Cain, lest anyone finding him should smite him.” (4:15) Sages throughout the ages debated the nature of the sign that Cain received. While some interpret the sign as a promise for Cain himself that he would be safe, others including Rashi understand that Cain received a literal sign. Rashi (on verse 15) writes that “[God] hewed His divine name upon [Cain's] forehead.” This clear symbol stood as a warning. First to those who may wish to do Cain harm, but just a clearly, it was a mark to others of Cain's murderous ways and a reminder that actions have consequences.

Hizballah (literally, “party of God”) has, since its founding, been supported by Iran and acts as a proxy in Iran's efforts to destroy Israel. Hizballah was founded as an organization dedicated to Israel's “obliteration.” It is widely seen by U.S. experts as the world's most technically capable terrorist organization. Centered in Lebanon, Hizballah targets U.S. allies and interests in the Middle East and across the world. In 1983, Hizballah claimed responsibility for the attack on the U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, which took the lives of 241 American servicemen. Today, Hizballah possesses an arsenal of 150,000 advanced rockets and missiles aimed at Israel.

Seeking to isolate Hizballah financially and to send a clear warning to all who support its terror, the U.S. Senate recently passed the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act of 2017. This bipartisan legislation was introduced by Sens. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH). The legislation strengthens and expands the scope of economic and financial sanctions imposed by previous legislation: the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015. It targets foreign governments that knowingly provide significant financial support to Hizballah and foreign individuals and companies that aid its fundraising or recruitment activities. The legislation imposes sanctions on foreign individuals and companies that aid Hizballah's fundraising or recruitment activities, including the provision of support to its media outlets. Additionally, it imposes sanctions on foreign government agencies or linked organizations that knowingly provide significant financial or material support to Hizballah amongst other provisions.

The recent actions of the U.S. Senate place a clear mark upon Hizballah that reminds everyone of its murderous ways. It is equally a sign to Iran and others who support Hizballah that they are, in fact “their brother's keeper” and that when they provide the financing for their brother to murder, there will be consequences. ■

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