



Sermon Tidbits

JANUARY 30, 2017

Parashat Bo

Alleviating their Suffering

How long shall this man be a snare to us? (Exodus 10:7)

עד מתי יהיה זה לנו למוקש (שמות י:ז)

Late last month, about ten thousand Gaza residents gathered for an unauthorized protest to publicly object to the lack of electricity across the Gaza Strip. According to the [New York Times](#), “They marched toward the offices of a Gazan electricity company, chanting slogans against Ismail Haniya, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, as well as against the rival Fatah party and its leader, Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority.” There is currently not enough electricity in Gaza because Hamas and the Palestinian Authority are locked in a dispute over both of their refusal to pay the fees necessary to transfer the diesel fuel which is needed for the electrical plant. According to the [Times of Israel](#), when Qatar discovered that the last fuel shipment it tried to send through Egypt “had vanished somewhere in the Sinai Peninsula,” the Qataris approached Israel, who quickly sent fuel trucks to supply Gaza with the necessary fuel.

While we direct our focus in Parashat Bo towards the major players in the narrative: Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh, the text offers subtle and sometimes glaring reminders that the actions of Pharaoh caused widespread devastation across the Land of Egypt. Moses warns the Egyptian king of the coming Plague of Locusts, during which Moses foretells that, “your houses shall be filled, and the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians” (10:6) with locusts that would torment the Egyptian populace. After the Pharaoh refuses to yield to Moses in the face of such destructive punishment, his aides suddenly appear in the narrative. Pharaoh’s servants said to him: “How long shall this man be a snare unto us? Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet know that Egypt is destroyed?” (10:7) We know the rest of the story. Pharaoh does not release the Israelites, and his hatred and vitriol for the Israelites unleashes wave after wave of suffering upon his people, including the devastating plague of the first born and the decimation of the Egyptian army at the Reed Sea.

Judaism teaches us that we cannot allow ourselves to remain indifferent to human suffering, even when speaking about a mortal enemy that has engaged in heinous behavior. At the Seder on Passover, we spill a drop of wine as we mention the plagues. After the first day of Passover, for the duration of the holiday we refrain from reciting the “full” Hallel, in part as a recognition of the words of the Divine to the Angles found in the Talmud. “The works of My hands are drowning in the sea and you wish to recite *Shirah*?!” (Babylonian Talmud Erchin 10b) Not only do we not rejoice in the suffering of others—even that of those who wish us harm, we also take pains to alleviate that suffering, especially when so many of those suffering are themselves victims of a brutal, terrorist regime. This is precisely why Israel works so hard to provide basic necessities to the citizens of Gaza.

Israel’s willingness to transfer the fuel to Gaza isn’t an isolated incident. Despite Hamas’ continued efforts to [build terror tunnels](#), [attack Israelis](#) and [rebuild its arsenal of missiles and rockets](#), Israel quietly facilitates the transfer of thousands of tons of goods to Gaza on an ongoing basis. Every month, COGAT—Israel’s Agency which oversees the transfer of materials to Gaza—releases a [report on Facebook](#) outlining its activities over the past month. In December of 2016, Israel transferred over 30,000 liters of fuel, and approximately eight hundred trucks daily delivered over 700,000 tons of materials, including tons of concrete that we hope is used to build houses and schools. In addition, Israel quietly [announced the construction](#) of a “new terminal that will be used to transfer construction materials to the Gaza Strip with no need for multiple loading and unloading on different trucks.” We of course strongly support

Israel's fight against Hamas and its efforts to neutralize the ever expanding threat of terror tunnels. At the same time, we marvel at Israel's continued efforts to alleviate the suffering of Gaza's citizens. Gazans, who like the subjects of Pharaoh, find themselves trapped in the clutches of a brutal regime consumed with hatred, which places its fanatical hatred of Israel ahead of the interests and well-being of its own citizens. ■

Going with Our Children

We will go with our young and with our old (Exodus 10:9)

בנערינו ובזקנינו נלך (שמות י:ט)

Last March, Jason Ciment of Los Angeles traveled to Washington, D.C. for his first AIPAC Policy Conference. There, together with seventeen thousand others, he heard politicians from across the political spectrum speak about the importance of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, attended sessions about the incredible work Israel does around the world, learned about the many threats the Jewish state must address, and lobbied his elected representatives. In a [moving article about the experience](#), he notes that he did not travel there alone. "I am here with three generations of Ciments, sandwiched in between my 17-year-old daughter and my parents and my aunt and uncle... Each of us sees the AIPAC Policy Conference through a different lens of age, life experience and values, we all seem able to hone in on the core messages and takeaways we keep witnessing from event to event." He came with his parents and aunt and uncle, and also brought his daughter to an event that she will hopefully never forget.

The Torah mentions children twice in the course of the first section of Parashat Bo. Moses was commanded to approach the Pharaoh and issue a warning about the coming plague of locusts which would compel the Egyptians to free the Jewish slaves. The plague would serve an additional purpose as well: "So that you may tell in the ears of your son, and of your son's son that which I have wrought upon Egypt..." (10:2) The Exodus—the story of the birth of our nation—must also be the story that we tell our children and the story of our national and religious identity. We tell the story to our children and to our grandchildren on the first night of Passover as we recite the Haggadah, which derives the from the Hebrew word *lehagid*—to tell, because our origin represents the basis for our cultural and religious identity. In addition, after Moses issued the warning to Pharaoh hoping to avoid the brunt of the locusts, Pharaoh initially considered relenting and allowing the Israelites to temporarily leave Egypt to worship in the desert. But before he permitted Moses to take the nation, he asked: "Who will be going?" Pharaoh assumed that only the adult men were needed to worship in the desert. Moses answered unequivocally: "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters..." (10:9) Judaism isn't the province of the adults and the old, for we do not go to worship and leave our children behind. Additionally, telling our children our core stories isn't enough. Rather, their participation represents an essential element of our faith tradition.

So many of us are actively involved in pro-Israel activism because we see our work of supporting a strong and free democratic Israel as an extension of both our faith and also of our identity as American Jews. While that work is critical and important, our Parashah asks us two additional questions: Do we tell the story of Israel to our children? Do they know not only about the birth of the Jewish state, but also about the incredible challenges that Israel has overcome to become a strong force for good in the world? Secondly, we must ask Pharaoh's question: "Who are you taking?" When we go to an event to support the Jewish state, do we bring our children, and especially our teens and college students? Have they felt the energy of a pro-Israel rally, or the power of gathering in Washington with thousands of activists to lobby Congress for continued support of the Jewish state?

Many synagogues send delegations to Washington, D.C. each year for AIPAC's Policy Conference, and we are proud of the members of our community who invest the time, energy and effort to make the trip. But we can and should ask the next question: Do we bring our children with us? Have we shared our story with them, and helped them to understand our passion and the importance of the work that we do? Moses reminds us that if we truly want to transmit our faith to the coming generations, we must also be able to say, "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters..." ■

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