

FEBRUARY 26, 2018

Parashat Ki Tisa

Stronger Together

Go and gather all of the Jews (Esther 4:16)

לך כנוס את כל היהודים (אסתר ד:טז)

Two weeks ago, a group of rock-throwing protesters at the Gaza border left a flag planted in the ground. When Israeli soldiers went to remove the banner for defensive reasons, terrorists detonated a bomb planted under it, injuring four soldiers, two of them seriously. According to the [New York Times](#), Israel placed the blame squarely at the feet of Hamas, which maintains strict control of its territory. “We, from our perspective, don’t care too much which organization pulled the trigger,” said Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, the spokesman for the Israel Defense Forces. “For us, there’s one address, and that’s Hamas. They are the ones who control access to the fence. Nobody has access to it without Hamas’s approval.” This short episode highlights the terrorist group’s continued willingness to target civilians in its goal of attacking and harming Israelis by any possible means.

Of the many significant days on the Jewish calendar, there is no day that emphasizes the theme of unity more than Purim. All four rituals of Purim revolve around this single theme: Reading the *Scroll of Esther*, sharing charity with the poor, giving gifts of food to one another, and gathering at a celebratory meal, are all means by which we bring people together in a closer bond and in solidarity. Furthermore, the famous call of Queen Esther of, “*Lech knos et kol hayehudim*”—“Go and gather all the Jews,” (Esther 4:16) captured the importance of unity when our nation faced a threat from our adversaries.

In the “*Asher Heini*” hymn customarily recited on Purim after the *Megillah* reading, we describe Esther’s emergence as the Jews’ savior with the words, “*Neitz parach mi-lulav hein Hadassah*”—“A shoot sprouted from a palm—this is Hadassah.” The author here appears to associate Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah, with the *hadas* (myrtle) included in the *arba minim* (“four species”) which we hold on Sukkot. This description of Esther and the reference to the four species brings to mind the famous comment in the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Parashat Emor*) viewing the four species as symbolic of four different types of Jews. The *arba minim* are held together to symbolize the unity and sense of mutual responsibility to which we should aspire. The description of Esther as having “sprouted” from the “*lulav*” to rescue the nation hints to Esther’s role in bringing the nation together in unity, as symbolized by the four species.

When we galvanize our resources and consolidate our efforts in order to defeat our foes, we are even stronger and more equipped to succeed. When the American Jewish community unifies with a loud voice and declares that we will not tolerate violence and terrorism against our brethren in the state of Israel, we can, and do, accomplish great things. This past week the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed the Hamas Human Shields Prevention Act ([H.R. 3542](#)). Authored by Reps. Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Seth Moulton (D-MA), this bill condemns Hamas’ use of human shields and imposes sanctions on those engaging in the practice. The bill notes that the use of human shields is both a violation of human rights and of international humanitarian law, and highlights the extensive efforts the Israel Defense Forces undertakes to avoid civilian casualties. The IDF routinely drops leaflets, makes announcements over radio, places phone calls, and sends text messages warning of a military strike prior to the targeting of terrorists operating in civilian areas. “For far too long, Hamas has taken shelter and launched offenses against Israel from civilian areas,” Rep. Wilson stated on the House floor. “I believe this legislation will promote working to ensure that lives of innocent civilians of the citizens of Gaza are spared.”

When the U.S. and Israel work hand in hand, with a unified front to fight terror, we have the potential to subdue and potentially eliminate those who perpetrate violence and terror. We, as a Jewish community, must continue to work towards strengthening the alliance between America and Israel, and together pursue the noble goal of ensuring that the world be safer and secure for all people. ■

Determining Our Fate and Destiny

And things were suddenly turned around (Esther 9:1)

ונהפוך הוא (אסתר ט:א)

The *Scroll of Esther*, which is traditionally read twice over Purim, begins with the detailed description of a celebratory gathering hosted by King Achashverosh. According to the Talmudic sages, Achashverosh and his advisors apparently knew of Jeremiah's prophecy that after seventy years in Babylonian exile the Jews' captivity would end (*Jeremiah 25:11-12*). Three years into his reign, Achashverosh became convinced that the seventy years had passed; therefore, he invited the Jews to an enormous feast celebrating his ascendancy and the Jews' failure to be redeemed. Soon after, Achashverosh along with Haman set in motion a plan to annihilate the Jewish nation. How could their plan possibly be stopped, or to use the words of the *Scroll of Esther* — “*Venahhafoch hu*” —how could things be “turned around?” (Esther 9:1)

Undoubtedly, the key factor came down to two individuals. Were it not for the heroism of Esther and Mordechai, the Jewish people may not have survived those fateful days. Yoram Hazony, in his well-regarded book on Purim, *The Dawn: Political Teachings of the Book of Esther*, sheds a new light on the highly charged political scene that sets the backdrop regarding the events that will ultimately unfold. Hazony reveals that Mordechai was not only a respected leader in the Jewish community, but he was also one of the advisors to Achashverosh, the king. Mordechai and Esther's close contact with the government leadership of their day gave them access to critical information and knowledge of the latest developments. They were well positioned to respond and influence decision-making that would be essential to the welfare and future survival of the Jewish nation.

The Sages famously point out that the name of God does not appear in *Megillat Esther*. Why not? One answer suggested by the modern Jewish thinker Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik is that the Purim story is meant to emphasize the centrality of man and woman and *our* ability, or more precisely, our responsibility, to take control of our fate and destiny. A critical takeaway for our community from the festival of Purim is the need to take control of our fate and continuously develop close ties and trusted relationships with our own government representatives and leadership. We must closely monitor current events and respond to them by sharing our perspectives, voicing our views and expressing concerns especially when it comes to issues related to the security of the Jewish people and the state of Israel.

This coming week AIPAC will hold its policy conference in Washington DC. It is the pro-Israel community's preeminent annual gathering. The event will attract more than 18,000 community and student activists from all 50 states. The Vice President of the United States, Prime Minister of Israel, members of Congress and countless Israeli and American policymakers and thought leaders will be in attendance. This event is a unique opportunity for people like ourselves to be present, to learn, to share our voices, and be a part of strengthening relationships with policy makers and our government leaders. It is perhaps the greatest gathering of Jewish political advocacy since the ancient age of Mordechai and Esther.

We commend those in our community who will be attending this wonderful gathering and will be present in Washington, DC. For those of us who have yet to attend an AIPAC Policy Conference, this is an opportune time to consider participating in local AIPAC events or attending AIPAC Policy Conference next year. In so doing, you can join the strong community of Jews and non-Jews who recognize the power and importance of political advocacy in determining our destiny and defending the Jewish people. ■

Please feel free to use any of the material in Sermon Tidbits, except for direct quotes, without attribution. 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.