

APRIL 30, 2018

## Parashat Emor

### Daily Discipline

And ye shall count (Leviticus 23:15)

וספרתם לכם (ויקרא כג:טו)

In the last several weeks the world has witnessed Hamas adopt a new strategy to threaten Israel's sovereignty and security. Mobilizing thousands of Gazan civilians to ostensibly peaceful protests along the border fence that separates Gaza from Israel, [Hamas](#) has embedded its terrorists among the civilians—launching a [wide range](#) of attacks and seeking to penetrate Israel's border. Using explosives, guns and Molotov cocktails, these terrorists ultimately intend to attack citizens within Israeli territory. This new strategy of employing violence while hiding behind peaceful protestors is an effort to manipulate world opinion against Israel. Mahmoud al-Habbash, a senior advisor to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said on April 6 that, "Hamas is deliberately sending Gazan civilians to their deaths to grab good headlines."

Is Hamas' intention to establish a Palestinian state living side-by-side with Israel? Hardly. On April 9 Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh [declared](#) that, "We will break the walls of the blockade, remove the occupation entity [Israel] and return to all of Palestine." Haniyeh is reiterating Hamas' policy of seeking to destroy Israel. Indeed, as the *New York Times* [reported](#) on April 27, "For weeks, Palestinians protesting along the fence between Gaza and Israel have conjured up the idea of swarming across the barrier... On Friday, both sides got a small sense of what that could mean when hundreds of Palestinians, urged on by a Hamas leader in a fiery midafternoon speech, rushed the security barrier at the eastern edge of Gaza City and tried to cross into Israel."

The period of time between Passover and Shavuot is called the Omer, and owes its name to the Omer sacrifice brought on the second day of Passover. From that day onward we count until we arrive at the holiday of Shavuot. Why does every other holiday have its own date, whereas we need to calculate the date of Shavuot by counting? The classic work *Sefer Hachinuch* understands this tally as a countdown to the important event that will soon transpire. We are anticipating the event and feel an excitement for its arrival, namely the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The idea of a countdown may appear in many familiar situations: a child's countdown to a birthday, the countdown of the days toward a vacation or the countdown towards a graduation. We can, however, distinguish between two types of countdowns. One type is when we are just letting the time pass as we anticipate the day. The second type is a countdown that requires effort each day in order to reach the end goal. The counting of the Omer and the culmination of Shavuot represents the latter. Each day that we enumerate symbolizes the need to be engaged, to take initiative and to make every day matter. We fortify our spiritual muscles so that we are ready to accept the Divine law at Sinai. This unique period in the Jewish calendar teaches us about facing challenges on a daily basis.

Israel faces an ongoing threat from Hamas. It is a daily threat. In the recent weeks while Hamas is using civilian demonstrators as human shields, Israel is faced with difficult decisions in defending its borders. Israel must either risk harming some number of Palestinian civilians by defending Israeli citizens, or avoid any harm to Palestinian civilians and risk the death of large numbers of Israeli citizens. By necessity, the government of Israel has done what any Western democracy would expect its leaders to do: it has ensured its security and sovereignty while minimizing as much as possible the inevitable casualties that result from Hamas' use of human shields. No country should be forced to make this choice, yet it is one that Israel must confront every time Hamas initiates a

new conflict. Fortunately, the United States is strongly supporting Israel's right to defend itself and protect its borders. Assistant to the President and Special Representative for International Negotiations [Jason Greenblatt](#) said, "we condemn leaders and protesters who call for violence or who send protesters—including children—to the fence, knowing that they be injured or killed."

On February 14 the House of Representatives unanimously passed (415-0) the Hamas Human Shields Act ([H.R. 3542](#)). Authored by Reps. Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Seth Moulton (D-MA), this bipartisan bill condemns Hamas' use of human shields and mandates sanctions against those members of the terror group who engage in the practice. We in the American Jewish community must express our appreciation, on a consistent basis, for America's unceasing support and ensure that our government continues to work shoulder to shoulder with Israel to confront these new and growing challenges from Hamas. ■

## Praying As One

---

I will be hallowed among the children of Israel (Leviticus 22:32)

בלבכ ארקיו) לארשי ינב דותב יתשדקנו

Recently [Congress](#) dramatically increased the allocation for Israeli missile defense programs to include ongoing Iron Dome and Arrow-3 development. "I am pleased and excited to announce that the US Congress has approved a record sum for Israel's defense program in 2018," Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman [announced](#) in Jerusalem a few weeks ago. These defense systems provide Israel with a protective umbrella to be able to counter threats posed by both short and mid-range missiles used by Gaza terror groups and Hezbollah, as well as the threat posed by more sophisticated long-range Iranian ballistic missiles. In recent weeks as the tensions have risen both along the Gaza border and on the northern border of Israel, the need for these defensive systems, such as the Iron Dome and David's sling, has become even more critical to safeguard Israel's wellbeing and security.

Our *parasha* contains the original source for communal prayer. The Talmud interprets the phrase, "but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel" (Leviticus 22:32) as a reference to prayer that is offered when Jews gather to form a *minyan*. The sages state (Talmud Berachot 21b) that, "any prayer of holiness cannot be recited with less than ten [people present]. Therefore, traditionally we only recite the *Kaddish*, *Kedushah*, and other communal prayers, as well as read from the Torah, with a *minyan* present. When we recite the *Amidah*, the silent devotion, the traditional custom is to allow for private prayer but then that same *Amidah* is repeated out loud. This repetition represents the prayer of the entire community." There is a unique power to the communal prayer. Our Sages have suggested that our communal prayer not only binds the gathering of attendees standing in the synagogue, but in a deeper sense, incorporates the prayer of the entire nation—we join hands at that moment with all the Children of Israel. In contrast, when we pray alone, without the critical mass, we stand alone and forego the power of being connected and intertwined with the community at large. The lesson of communal prayer suggests that we are stronger together. A voice and action that is dedicated to a common cause results in greater success.

With this lesson in mind, we can more fully appreciate how fortunate we are that our government stands at Israel's side in numerous areas, and most notably in offering ongoing substantial financial support. This past March President Trump signed into law the Fiscal Omnibus Appropriations [bill](#), including key provisions to help Israel address critical security challenges. The bill provides \$3.1 billion in overall security assistance to Israel. The bill also includes the Taylor Force Act—bipartisan legislation that would eliminate funding that directly benefits the Palestinian Authority if it continues its abhorrent practice of paying salaries to terrorists or their families. The spending bill also contains a total of \$708.8 million for U.S. missile defense cooperation; representing \$105 million more than last year's adopted funding level. These funds support both research and development for key programs that help Israel defend its citizens against rocket and missiles, and also advance America's own missile defense capabilities. We must continue to urge members of Congress to ensure that we always strengthen the unique relationship that binds our country and Israel. ■

---

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](mailto:synagogue@aipac.org).