

AUGUST 6, 2018

## Parashat Re'eh

### Two Great Lights

**Behold...a blessing and a curse (Deut. 11:26)**

**ראה...ברכה וקללה (דברים יא:כו)**

A defining trait of leadership is the ability to frame reality. Exceptional leaders can assess situations and establish paths towards success for the greater community. Moses epitomizes this leadership. In the opening of *Parashat Re'eh*, Moses instructs: "I am setting before you today the blessing and the curse—the blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commandments of the Lord your God" (Deut. 11:26-28). Continuing his insightful tone, Moses says later in Deuteronomy, "I set before you life and the good and the bad...therefore choose life so you and your children after you may live" (Deut. 30:15). Moses defines reality for all generations to come, emphasizing the big picture. The meaning of events is not always easy to comprehend; it takes keen insight to clarify them for the nation.

As the summer ends, we begin to shift our focus to Rosh Hashanah and the start of the new year. As such, Judaically, we reflect on the past year, taking stock, assessing the year and thinking of individuals who are no longer with us. This year, we think of two leaders who, like Moses, helped frame reality for our community as towering intellectuals and eminent supporters of Israel: Professor Bernard Lewis and Dr. Charles Krauthammer. On May 19, Professor Bernard Lewis passed away at the age of 101; On June 21, Dr. Charles Krauthammer passed away at the age of 68.

Said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: "Bernard Lewis was one of the great scholars of Islam and the Middle East in our time. We will forever be grateful for his robust defense of Israel." A master of 15 languages and four civilizations—Western, Classical, Islamic and Jewish—Lewis was the preeminent historian on the Middle East during the second half of the 20th century and early 21st century. "While never deeply religious, my father (Lewis) was always a proud and unequivocal Jew...with a long, deep attachment to Israel," Lewis' son said in his eulogy. While working in a milieu of Middle East scholarship rife with hostility to Israel—which not infrequently morphed into anti-Semitism—Lewis' Judaism and his open attachment to Israel earned him the enmity of many of colleagues. However, he remained a strong advocate for the Jewish state, buried now in Trumpeldor Cemetery along with many Israeli luminaries.

Like Moses and Professor Lewis, Dr. Charles Krauthammer nobly framed reality for his community through his role as a journalist. Self-proclaimed as attuned to the "tragic element in history," Krauthammer was eulogized by Prime Minister Netanyahu as "among the greatest supporters that the state of Israel has ever had...he defended Israel in a way that is difficult to describe: methodically, with great creativity and with very great daring." Krauthammer began writing a weekly column for *The Washington Post* in 1985 and won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary. Krauthammer attributed many of his politics to his Jewish parents who escaped the Holocaust. "The return to Zion is now the principle drama of Jewish history," Krauthammer wrote. "What began as an experiment has become the very heart of the Jewish people: its cultural, spiritual, and psychological center, soon to become its demographic center as well. Israel is the hinge. Upon it rests the hopes—the only hope—for Jewish continuity and survival."

As we study Moses' daring leadership in *Parashat Re'eh*, it is incumbent upon us to learn from these precious personalities: two individuals who spoke up for Israel and the Jewish people. As leaders, we too play a critical role in framing realities for our peers, particularly for the causes close to our hearts and identities. We pray that the memory of these two remarkable souls will always be a blessing. ■

## Fear of the Night

God brought you forth out of Egypt by night (Deut. 16:1)

הוציאך ה' מצרים לילה (דברים טז:א)

The potential for war on Israel's northern and southern borders is growing. Miscalculations on either border could lead to further deterioration. To the south, a Palestinian sniper in Gaza killed an Israeli soldier with an Iranian-made rifle. In response, Israel struck Hamas military targets. To the north, David's Sling—the middle tier of Israel's multi-layered missile-defense system—[was activated](#) for first time against two rockets launched from Syria. And finally, just outside of Jerusalem, a terrorist breached the small community of Adam, killing thirty-one-year-old Israeli husband and father of two, [Yotam Ovadia](#). “Every so often we are reminded that we are still fighting for our home,” said Avi Roeh, head of the of the Binyamin Regional Council. Unfortunately, once again, Israel is forced to contend with adversaries that threaten her safety and the wellbeing of her citizens.

In *Parashat Re'eh*, God commands, “Guard the month of the spring, and make Passover to the Lord your God, because it was the month of the spring that the Lord your God took you out of Egypt in the night” (Deut. 16:1). Strikingly, the verse emphasizes “spring.” Festivals are rarely described in the Torah in relation to their season. Rather, the Torah often commands the calendar date on which to observe the holiday. Furthermore, the verse emphasizes that the exodus happened at “night.” Night is a symbol of fear, trepidation and great uncertainty. Like night, Egypt was a very dark place; According to the Midrash, one never managed to escape from Egypt.

The juxtaposition of the themes of “spring” and “night” teach a valuable lesson. On the one hand, we are obligated to remember that the exodus from Egypt occurred at night because it symbolizes vulnerability and trepidation. On the other hand, “spring” reminds us that the Jewish people never lose faith in morning coming. All may look barren during the frigid winter, but when spring comes, the seeds buried in the ground abruptly begin to emerge. In a blink of the eye, there is growth, life and vibrancy. Jewish history and the Jewish experience are saturated with this duality. For centuries, the Jewish people have contended with tragedy, fear and pain. Yet, we don't give in, moving forward with optimism, hope and resilience. The modern state of Israel too has withstood contention and strife. But with resolve to remember “spring,” Israel remains robust and strong. Israel's resolve is only strengthened by her allies, who, like the United States, come to her aid in difficult times.

On August 1, Congress adopted the final version of the bipartisan John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. The bill authorizes \$500 million for U.S.-Israel missile defense cooperation and up to \$50 million for U.S.-Israel counter-tunnel cooperation. In accordance with the 2016 U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding on security assistance, this bill funds both R&D and procurement for the Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow-2 and Arrow-3 defense systems. These programs enable Israel to defend its citizens while advancing America's own missile defense capabilities.

In the same week that the NDAA passed, the U.S. Senate approved the U.S-Israel Security Assistance Authorization Act. This bipartisan legislation authorizes increases in U.S. security assistance to Israel, and it encourages expanded weapons stockpiles and new U.S.-Israel cooperation in anti-drone technologies, cybersecurity and space. Speaking of the Security Assistance Act, Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) [said](#), “The passage of this bipartisan legislation represents the continuation of America's unshakable, seven-decade commitment to Israel's security.” Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) [added](#), “The security assistance included in this bill will help Israel protect itself in the midst of regional instability; deter—and if necessary defend against—Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas; and deepen bilateral ties for the next decade and beyond.”

As we consider the dichotomy of “night” and “spring” highlighted in this week's *parasha*, we think deeply of Israel's threats and hope. Despite Israel's vulnerability to impending threats, we in the pro-Israel community can look towards “spring,” knowing that our support of the U.S.-Israel relationship helps maintain the hope that gets Israel through the “night(s).” ■

---

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).