

FEBRUARY 12, 2018

Parashat Terumah

Peace Requires Courageous Leaders

And you shall make the planks...upright (Exodus 26: 15)

ועשית את הקרשים...עומדים (שמות כו: טו)

Last week, 19-year-old Israeli Arab Abed al-Karim Adel Assi [fatally stabbed](#) Rabbi Itamar Ben-Gal while Ben-Gal was waiting for a bus outside the city of Ariel. A respected educator, Rabbi Ben-Gal left behind a wife and four young children. According to the [Jerusalem Post](#), Ben-Gal's death marks the second time this month that an Israeli has been killed in a terror attack in the Samaria region. Hamas welcomed the attack releasing a statement that, "The stabbing attack is proof that the Al-Quds intifada continues." Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, cast blame for the attack on the Palestinian leadership's "policy of incitement" and called on the U.N. Security Council to condemn the attack. "This terror attack is the direct result of incitement and payments to terrorists by the Palestinian Authority. Instead of inviting Mahmoud Abbas to address the Security Council to disseminate lies and hate, the council should unequivocally condemn this attack and demand that he stop paying stipends to terrorists."

Parashat Terumah teaches the following law regarding the building of the Tabernacle: "And you shall make the planks for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, upright" (Exodus 26:15). This verse is utilized to teach the rule that the planks which constitute the walls of the Tabernacle must be cut from the acacia tree parallel to the direction of the tree's original growth and laid so that the lower part of the board corresponds to the lower part of the original tree, "as it naturally grows." The key term in this verse is "upright." If the boards were to be turned upside-down, this would be invalid for the building of the Tabernacle. The Talmud (*Tractate Sukkah* 45b) learns from this particular law the general principle that all *mitzvot* that are based on plant life, such as the *lulav* (palm), *hadasim* (myrtles) and *aravot* (willows) must also be taken, "in their original growth orientation," tall and upright. This seemingly technical law conveys the invaluable lesson that we too must emulate the beams of the Tabernacles and stand upright and tall. When we are faced with challenges, as individuals or as a nation, we need to be bold in our decision-making in order to further our success and our well-being. Only leaders who are willing to "stand tall" and make difficult but courageous decisions can lead their people or country to continued growth and prosperity.

Time and time again, Israeli leaders have been willing to stand tall and make bold, difficult decisions in the long-term best interest of the Jewish state. In the late 1970's, Prime Minister Menachem Begin made the courageous decision to return the entire Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in return for a permanent peace agreement. That choice has proved the test of time, leading to a lasting peace that has brought quiet to Israel's border with Egypt. Israel's leaders have consistently expressed their desire to negotiate a peace agreement with the Palestinian Authority and make the difficult concessions necessary to reach an agreement. In July 2013, when U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry helped initiate a round of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel agreed to the painful step of releasing 104 Palestinian prisoners, many of whom had murdered Israelis. Sadly, the Palestinian leadership never took the next step by offering concessions of their own and the peace negotiations failed.

While the Israeli government offers its hand in peace, it finds no partner willing to reciprocate on the other side of the table. In a recent jarring and disturbing speech, PA President Mahmoud Abbas [declared](#) the "Oslo Peace Accords dead," rejected any American role in peace talks, and also called for "suspending recognition of Israel." Despite Abbas' rhetoric, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley reaffirmed the United States' commitment to fostering peace between Israelis and Palestinians and argued that a peace agreement could still be possible if Abbas were to demonstrate courageous leadership and not close the door to bilateral negotiations. In her words, "We remain

committed to the possibility and potential of two states, if agreed to by the parties. If President Abbas demonstrates he can be that type of leader, we would welcome it. His recent actions demonstrate the total opposite.”

We must continue to support the efforts to promote a two state solution. We must also encourage the Palestinian people to insist that its leadership, rather than encouraging hatred and terror, stand tall and make the difficult but necessary choices that will lead to a durable Israel-Palestinian peace. ■

Recognizing the Centrality of Jerusalem

And you shall make Me a Sanctuary” (Exodus 25:8)

ועשו לי מקדש (שמות כה:ח)

In his address to the Knesset during his recent visit to Israel, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence [beautifully articulated](#) a message of support for Jerusalem and its historic importance to the state of Israel. He told the members of Israel’s parliament that, “The Jewish people’s unbreakable bond to this sacred city reaches back more than 3,000 years. It was here, in Jerusalem, on Mount Moriah, that Abraham offered his son, Isaac, and was credited with righteousness for his faith in God. It was here, in Jerusalem, that King David consecrated the capital of the Kingdom of Israel. And since its rebirth, the modern State of Israel has called this city the seat of its government. Jerusalem is Israel’s capital.” In this address, as well as in numerous additional public statements, the U.S. government has fully supported the position that [Jerusalem is the capital of Israel](#). These statements have elicited strong, positive response from a wide spectrum of the Israeli public. The hearts of Jews worldwide have been uplifted hearing this unequivocal recognition of the city Jerusalem as a dynamic multicultural and multi-religious metropolis that has served as the Jewish people’s historic and spiritual capital for 3,000 years.

Terumah opens with the widely known command to build a place of worship, the Tabernacle, for the Jewish people. Constructed in the wilderness, the Tabernacle served as a focal point of prayer and worship. When the Israelites finally completed their famous journey and arrived in the Land of Israel, they transformed the Tabernacle into a permanent structure, ultimately constructing the holy Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. Over the next few weeks, we’ll read several Torah portions about the precise instructions regarding the construction of the Tabernacle and its vessels. *Terumah* and the *parashot* that follow, remind of the centrality of the Temple situated in Jerusalem in the life of the Jewish people.

The Temple served as a place in prayer and the seat of the highest court in the land for centuries. Following the destruction of the First Temple and the exile of the Jewish community from Jerusalem, Ezra, Nehemiah and Zerubavel led the Jewish people in their return to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem, where they built a second Temple on the exact same plot of land. The Second Temple, with the aid of Herod the Great, evolved into one of the most magnificent and dynamic centers in the ancient world. Once again, sadly, the Temple was destroyed and Jews exiled. However, the Jewish people never for a moment gave up on the dream of returning to our beloved and sacred city. Today, after almost 2,000 years in the Diaspora, the Jewish people have remarkably returned to Jerusalem. Over a half a million Jews live in Jerusalem—nearly ten percent of the six and half million Jews living in the state of Israel. Jerusalem encapsulates the noble history and spiritual longing of the Jew. Jerusalem is the city that unifies the Jewish people and serves as its focal point that inspires our loftiest aspirations and dreams.

On December 6, 2017, when the United States officially recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, Prime Minister Netanyahu [called the recognition](#) one of the most important expressions of support in the modern history of Israel. We cannot take this important, long-awaited (and long overdue) step for granted. We must express to our elected officials our unwavering support and appreciation for this important declaration, which acknowledges the truth of history and the centrality of Jerusalem to 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.