

MAY 28, 2018

Parashat Beha'alotcha

The Truth About Gaza

Make thee two trumpets (Numbers 10:2)

עשה לך שתי הצוצרות (במדבר י:ב)

Since March 30, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have conducted weekly, sometimes daily, mass demonstrations along the security fence, known collectively as the “March of Return.” Though the marches were started by a coalition of various groups in Gaza, who called for them to be non-violent, the plans were quickly co-opted by the Hamas terror group, which has ruled the coastal enclave since taking it over in 2007 in a violent coup. Sadly, and depressingly, under Hamas’ instigation and direction, the protests turned violent when insurgents attempted to breach the border fence and Israel was forced to take action to keep them from being successful. Despite using subterfuge in an attempt to present those killed at the fence as peaceful protesters, Hamas has now admitted that 50 of the dead were members of the terror group. Three others were Islamic Jihad members. IDF Spokesman Brig. Gen. Ronen Manelis described the protests as Hamas-orchestrated “theatrics” targeting the international audience. “The idea that this was a peaceful protest is the biggest lie of all, because the basic tenets required for a protest in a democracy like the U.S. or Israel do not exist in Gaza,” [Manelis](#) said, noting that Gazans have no freedom of speech or freedom of the press under the Islamist terror group’s rule.

This week’s *parasha* of *Be’haalotcha* tells us about the trumpets that were sounded to prepare the Jewish people to journey toward the Promised Land. The verse says, “Make two trumpets of silver, make them of hammered work. They shall serve you to summon the congregation [*edah*] and cause the camps [*machanot*] to journey.” (Numbers 10:1-2). Rabbi Lord Jonathan [Sacks](#), the former chief rabbi of United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth [U.K.] suggests that this verse alludes to two distinct gatherings of people. The first kind of “peoplehood” are those who gather and band together because they face a common enemy. They work to protect one another and find security from danger. This group can be identified as a *machaneh*. They come together in the same way that a herd or flock joins together—purely in a defensive mode. However, there is a much loftier vision for a community to strive for and aspire to attain. This second type of “peoplehood” can be captured best in the word *edah*. The word *edah* is based in the root word *ed*, which means *testimony*. This group is a creative group. They work together to achieve and attain lofty goals and carry out a noble vision. When the Torah outlines the rules of the “trumpets” that summon both the *machaneh* and the *edah*, it calls upon the Jewish community to pursue and forge ahead in both areas: we must protect one another from harm, ensuring the people of Israel and its land’s safety and security. Additionally, we as a nation must strive to live up to the highest standards of ethics and morality and fashion a society that reflects the wisdom and elevated standards delineated in the Torah.

Israel’s efforts on the Gaza border reflect both of these ideals. The IDF is committed to ensuring the safety of the citizens of Israel and committed to engaging in warfare that abides by moral and ethical standards. For the past number of weeks, Hamas has used “non-violent protests” in an attempt to overrun Israel’s border and kill its civilians, and it is Hamas that bears the responsibility for the recent bloodshed. Unfortunately, the terrorist group prefers to sacrifice the people of Gaza over pursuing peaceful coexistence with Israel. Hamas’s ongoing terrorism—including the destruction of humanitarian infrastructure—makes it clear that the terror group does not seek a better life for the people of Gaza. Despite ongoing violence and destruction of crossing point infrastructure, Israel continues to transfer humanitarian aid and building material to Gaza. The United States also continues to provide significant funding for humanitarian aid and projects in Gaza.

We in the Jewish community must express our gratitude to the U.S. for its continued support of Israel's right to defend itself and protect its borders. Additionally, we should support a strategy in which the United States increases sanctions on Hamas, presses the terrorist group to disarm, accept Israel's right to exist, and begin to explore a new path that will lead to greater coexistence and the potential for real peace. ■

The Flame Burns Bright

When you light the lamps (Numbers 8:2)

בהעלתך את הנרות (במדבר ח:ב)

The United States' decision to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem has inspired other countries to follow our lead. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has attended three embassy openings in a week in the Israeli capital. President Horacio [Cartes](#) opened the Paraguayan embassy in the same building in which Guatemala opened its embassy in the capital the week earlier. The Prime Minister Netanyahu recalled that Paraguay helped Jews escape Nazi Germany both before and during the Holocaust, and also took in refugees after the war. Netanyahu also recalled that Paraguay supported the establishment of Israel during the partition vote in the UN in 1947. President Cartes, who was the first Paraguayan leader to visit Israel when he came in 2016, praised Israel for courageously defending its right to live in peace, and for "building a praiseworthy economically prosperous state that ensures its future and that of its children."

Our *parasha* this week opens with the mitzvah of lighting the Menorah each day in the Temple. The title of the *parasha*, *Beha'alotcha* refers to the actual lighting of the wicks and ensuring that they are properly lit so that they burn through the night. The classic Torah commentator Ramban that the mitzvah of lighting the menorah is listed here, rather than earlier in the Torah, in direct response to an episode that transpired in the previous Torah portion (at the end of *Parashat Naso*). The Ramban quotes a rabbinic teaching that claims that Aaron the High Priest felt saddened that he was not invited to take part in the ceremony of sacrifices that inaugurated the Temple. God answered Aaron by saying "You did not have this set of sacrifices to offer but you will have the obligation to light the Menorah daily." The midrash continues and says that God assures Aaron: "The lighting of the Menorah will not only be observed in the Temple but will continue to be lit for all generations among the Jewish people." The sages of the midrash view the Menorah as a symbol of resiliency and eternal hope. When the newly born state of Israel searched for a symbol that would serve as its emblem, they chose the image of the Menorah, based on the relief found on the arch of Titus. With unmistakable symbolic intent, the founders of the new Jewish homeland meant to tell the story of the demise of the Jewish people and her determination and miraculous revival. The menorah, which was lit each day in the Temple in Jerusalem, is a precious symbol of our timeless connection with our holy city.

It is gratifying to see that other countries are following the United States' lead by relocating their embassies to Jerusalem. These countries are showing the world, with action, that Israel and its capital city deserve the same respect afforded to any country. Israel anticipates that in the coming months and years even more countries will follow suit. We in the pro-Israel community will always be grateful that it was the [United States](#) who was the first country to move its embassy to Jerusalem. With this undertaking and historic gesture of friendship the U.S.-Israel alliance has been enhanced and bolstered. We look forward to the future and pray that this alliance continues to be strengthened so that together, America and Israel will serve as a model of democracy and freedom for every nation across the globe. ■

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.