

MAY 21, 2018

Parashat Naso

Who is a Prince?: The Historic Opening of the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem

The Princes of Israel (Numbers 7:2)

נשיאי ישראל (במדבר ז:ב)

Seventy years ago, on May 14th, 1948, Israel's founding father David Ben-Gurion brought together members of the Jewish People's Council in the Tel Aviv Museum. Standing underneath a portrait of the pioneer of the Zionist movement, Theodore Herzl, Ben-Gurion affirmed the historic right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and then declared the founding of the modern state of Israel. 11 minutes later, U.S. President Harry S Truman recognized the new state, over the objection of many of his advisors. Now, seven decades later, President Trump took the next step when he recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and moved the U.S. Embassy there. Candidates for president—of both parties—have long promised to move the embassy, only to fail to deliver once in the White House. Thus, President Trump should be commended for following through on his promise and for implementing the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995.

This Shabbat we read *Parashat Naso*. It has 176 verses, making it the longest *parasha* in the Torah. Many of these verses describe the sacrifices offered by the princes of the tribes on the day the *mishkan* was consecrated in the desert. Each day the prince for each tribe brought a sacrifice to honor this significant day in the history of the nation of Israel. The Torah relates the following: "The princes of Israel, the heads of their father's house, presented [their offerings]. They were the leaders of the tribes. They were the ones who were present during the counting." The classic commentator Rashi associates the princes with the Egyptian taskmaster: "They were the officers [appointed] over them in Egypt, and they were beaten on account of them." These individuals bore the brunt of the nation on their shoulders. They took a beating themselves when the quota of bricks were not completed by the slaves each day. When the verse describes them as "heads of their father's house," it is meant to allude to the idea that they treated their fellow Jews as their own children. They are called a *nasi*—a prince. The Hebrew word *nasi* is related to the word *naso*, which means to "carry." These great leaders carried the weight of their people on their shoulders and never shied away from their responsibilities. They were concerned with their fellow man and helped relieve their burdens and pains. Great leadership makes the concerns of others their first priority; they live up to their word, and act courageously by setting an example for others in their continuous pursuit of morality and justice.

The U.S. government's bold decision to declare Jerusalem Israel's capital and place its embassy there, is a contemporary example of exemplary leadership. A definitive message has been broadcast to the world in favor of justice and democracy. For nearly seven decades we have witnessed the anomaly of world leaders, whose countries reject Jerusalem as the capital, traveling precisely to that city to meet with Israeli presidents and prime ministers, to see the Knesset members and to hold dialogue in the Foreign Affairs Ministry. The Jewish world expresses its thanks to a president who has done what we long knew to be true, in recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital or doing, as he has said, simply recognizing reality—Jerusalem *is* Israel's capital. This is a proud moment for the American Jewish community and a proud moment for Israel—and a testament to the strong alliance between the U.S. and the State of Israel that has just grown even stronger. ■

Shalom Is a Name of God

..and grant you peace (Numbers 6:26)

וישם לך שלום (במדבר ו:כו)

Many thousands of people took to the streets in Tel Aviv to celebrate the victory of Netta Barzilai in the Eurovision music contest. In a week that celebrated the 51st anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem and the official opening of the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, Israel's victory in the major song competition in Europe added more even joy to many in Israel. Despite widespread enthusiasm from fans, [flyers](#) from a European Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign called for Israel to be boycotted at the Eurovision contest, attempting to sabotage victory from the young Israeli singer and undermine Israel's opportunity to celebrate its talent and joy on an international stage. Since its founding in 1948, Israel's enemies have repeatedly attempted to undermine and ultimately destroy the Jewish state through military assaults, terrorist attacks and actions at international organizations. More recently, the BDS campaign has emerged in an effort to stigmatize, delegitimize and isolate the state of Israel.

One of the oldest prayers in the world is found in Parashat Naso. The words of the priestly blessing, which originally were offered by the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem and continue to be a part of our liturgy, concludes with a blessing for peace—*shalom*. Rabbi Isaac Arama, a Torah commentator in 15th century Spain, explains that *shalom* does not mean merely the absence of war or strife. It means completeness, perfection, the harmonious working of a complex system, and integrated diversity. It is no accident that the priestly blessing ends—as do the vast majority of Jewish prayers—with a prayer for peace. Our great Sages taught that *Shalom* is one of names of God himself. Isaac Abrabanel (1437-1508) writes, “That is why God is called ‘peace,’ because it is He who binds the world together and orders all things according to their particular character and posture. For when things are in their proper order, peace will reign.” (*Commentary to Pirkei Avot 2:12*). Parshat Naso teaches the practical measures necessary to make peace a reality. Peace is not only something we pray for but something that requires determined effort and persistence. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook offered the following penetrating insight. According to the Sages, *Shalom* is a sacred name of God and *emet*—“truth”—is God's seal. A name or a signature is written gradually, one letter at a time, whereas a seal is stamped all at once. Like a king's signet ring, it is dipped in molten wax and then is stamped on a royal decree to authenticate it. If a signet ring is broken it cannot be used - a partial truth is not truth. *Peace*, however, is like a name or signature in that it progresses gradually, a little at a time.

The state of Israel remains steadfast and committed to providing equal rights and democratic values for everyone while also continuing to pursue peace with all her neighbors. The national and international BDS campaigns perhaps are the most pernicious and detrimental to Israel because they deny both of these realities. Waged in European capitals and in institutions like the United Nations, state-led BDS seeks to isolate Israel politically and economically. Outside nations and international institutions have threatened Israel with economic penalties if it does not make unilateral political concessions outside the context of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. In seeking to impose such one-sided “solutions” on Israel, BDS efforts undermine the prospects for peace by relieving Palestinians of the need to negotiate with Israel and by promoting demands that forgo any expectation of compromise. BDS does not aim to affect positive political change or improve the situation for the Palestinians. Rather, BDS' objective is to delegitimize Israel and undermine its right to exist. BDS proponents seek to drive a wedge between Israel and the rest of the world—separating Israel's government, businesses, universities, and people from their partners abroad. There are many who refuse to see the truth about the Jewish homeland and her sincerity in pursuing peace and bringing stability and mutual respect throughout the Middle East. We must be vigilant in safeguarding Israel from the various organizations and measures that seek to undermine the true character of the Jewish state. ■

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