

APRIL 16, 2018

## Parashat Tazria-Metzora

### Shades of White

**On the place of the inflammation there is white (Leviticus 13:19)**

והיה במקום השחין שאת לבנה (ויקרא יג:יט)

On the Erev Passover, 17,000 Palestinians gathered in 16 locations in the Gaza strip. These “protest marches” are being fueled by Hamas and are potentially being used as cover to carry out terror attacks on Israel. Ahead of the protests, Israel made it clear that it would use force to prevent what it feared might be a “deliberate charge on its borders.” During the protests, it was discovered that [Hamas](#) sent in terrorists to cut the border fence and to infiltrate into territory under the cover of the smoke caused by thousands of burning tires. Israel was able to foil all these attempts. Following the demonstrations, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [said](#) that although the demonstrations at the Gaza border spoke in the name of human rights, their true intent is to destroy the Jewish state. The prime minister then saluted IDF soldiers who he said were “protecting us from those pretending to speak in the name of human rights, who wave the Nazi flag.”

The double portion of *Tazria-Metzora* focuses on the spiritual skin ailment known as *tzara'at*, a malady that manifests as spots on a person's body, clothing or home. Regarding the spots on the body, only certain, strong shades of white can potentially cause the individual to be pronounced *tamei*, spiritually impure. This is surprising as we often find that the color white in Jewish law and thought is a sign of holiness and purity, such as when Priests wear white garments in the Temple during their sacred service. So, would it not seem that the color white is associated with purity and forgiveness, not death and impurity?

The answer is that white on the outer skin also can represent a facade that does not reflect the true colors that are hidden below and when one scratches the surface the true content is exposed. There is a significant biblical figure whose name alludes to this idea: Lavan—whose name literally means “white.” The Passover Haggadah says that Lavan attempted to destroy the Jewish people. Although, at first glance Lavan appeared relatively harmless: he opened his home to his nephew Jacob, he hires Jacob and then marries off his daughters to him—in truth he presented a potentially lethal danger to Jacob and his descendants.

Israel has exposed the true intent behind the recent protests in Gaza, and the U.S. has backed Israel's position. The [U.S. blocked](#) a U.N. Security Council statement calling for an independent probe into the deadly clashes on the Gaza border. After Kuwait circulated the draft statement, Israel's Ambassador to the U.N. Danny Danon called on the Security Council instead to condemn Hamas for endangering the lives of children by using them as human shields and to “stop the provocations that only increase the violence and tension.” During a recent phone call, Prime Minister Netanyahu thanked U.S. President Donald Trump for American support at the UN and its continuing condemnation of Hamas. Today, [Hamas](#) is rebuilding its military infrastructure; six million Israelis are within range of an estimated 10,000 rockets. Hamas also claims to have employed 1,000 diggers who have completed 50 new tunnels, 17 of which extend into Israeli territory. While the IDF has spent considerable efforts to address the threat of tunnels and protect its citizens—U.S. security assistance to Israel is vital in helping Israel confront this key challenge.

We in the Jewish community must continue to express our gratitude to the U.S. government, to our members of Congress and senators, for their unwavering support expressed in words and actions. We must play our part to ensure that the U.S. stands with Israel and helps guarantee that the Jewish homeland has the right to defend its citizens and secure its borders from those who pose a threat to its very existence. ■

## Counting Up

And you shall count for yourselves (Leviticus 23:15)

וספרתם לכם (ויקרא כג:טו)

This past week Jews all over the world celebrated the state of Israel's 70th anniversary. From a tiny country born out of great struggle and resilience in 1948, Israel has not only survived, but has flourished beyond anyone's imagination. Through countless conflicts that Israel has been forced to enter, complex challenges of absorbing millions of immigrants from around the world, and continued efforts on behalf of her opponents fighting her legitimacy, Israel has become one of the world's most astounding success stories of the last 70 years. In medicine, science, technology, and global humanitarian outreach—Israel is a world leader. Israel's military prowess, born of necessity, is legendary, but Israel is also known around the world for its food, TV shows, and LGBT-friendly society. In a word, the strides Israel has made in its first 70 years are remarkable.

As the holiday of Passover is now behind us, a unique Jewish tradition prescribes that we formally count each day until the festival of Shavuot, known as the *Sefirat Haomer*—the counting of the Omer. Maimonides, in his philosophical work, *The Guide to the Perplexed* (3:43), offers his understanding of the “Counting of the Omer.” He says that the Exodus from Egypt is inextricably linked with receiving the Torah at Sinai on Shavuot. Similar to how anyone that is anticipating seeing a loved one also counts the days and weeks until their next meeting, so too, we as a people are anxiously counting the days and weeks until the great meeting, the revelation at Sinai—when the Jewish people received the Torah. This explanation allows for the posing of the following question: When we anticipate an event we usually count *down* the days until the appointed time. However, when we count the Omer, we do not count *down* ( i.e., 49, 48, 47...)—instead we count *up*. Why?

Our Sages offer various answers. One approach suggests this counting reflects the way the Israelites counted as they set out on their trek to Mount Sinai. They were uncertain about the future and they did not know what the coming days would bring, but they exhibited deep faith and determination as they forged ahead, counting a day at a time until they reached a pinnacle moment in their history upon reaching Mount Sinai. In this same spirit, as we count *up* the years of our young Jewish homeland, we celebrate each day and envision a Jewish homeland that continues to thrive and strives to live up to the ideals and values that are dear to us as Jews and to democracies across the globe.

One of the most effective ways we can partner in building on the success of the state of Israel is to ensure that our U.S. government's positions and policies remain supportive and caring of the Jewish homeland. We are most fortunate to have many committed and trusted voices in the U.S. government who stand firmly with Israel and come to her aid and [cooperation](#) between our two countries that is advantageous for both nations. In a recent talk delivered by U.S. Senator [Marco Rubio](#), he outlined three components that underscore the U.S.-Israel alliance. One, America should be a friend to our friends and Israel, being one of the U.S.'s strongest allies, certainly makes them deserving of support. The second he said was that “Israel stands for the everything we hope that the Middle East will become: A free-enterprise democracy that is pro American—if we had more countries like that in the Middle East our lives would be a lot simpler.” And third, he argued: “Israel has a unique purpose. Unlike any other nation on earth it was created for a very specific purpose in the aftermath of the Holocaust to ensure there never again not be a homeland for the Jewish people and an ability to defend themselves when anti-Semitism turns into violence.” Senator Rubio is co-sponsoring with U.S. Senator Christopher Coons of Delaware (D), a bill calling for security assistance and expanded U.S.-Israel cooperation.

We in the pro Israel community must continue strengthening our relationships with U.S. leadership and policy makers. As we count *up* from Israel's 70th birthday, we are confident that Israel will have an even brighter future ahead, especially when the deep-rooted relationship between these two great nations, the U.S. and Israel, continues to grow and flourish. ■

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