

MARCH 19, 2018

Shabbat HaGadol - Parashat Tzav

“The Great Shabbat” of Peace

A day of God that will be great and awesome (Malachi 3:23)

יום ה' הגדול והנורא (מלאכי ג:כג)

We, as Jews, have always believed that there is no greater value in our tradition than the importance of peace. So too does the Jewish state. Repeatedly, Israel has demonstrated its willingness to make sacrifices for peace: In 1982, Israel withdrew its forces and uprooted Jewish settlers from the Sinai Peninsula to implement its 1979 peace treaty with Egypt. Pursuant to the 1995 Oslo II Interim Agreement and the 1988 Wye River Memorandum, Israel ceded responsibility for the civil affairs and maintaining public order to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in parts of the West Bank. In 2005, Israel withdrew its forces and evacuated all Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip. The most recent round of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks began in July 2013, but the Palestinian Authority pulled out of the talks in the spring of 2014. Israel's longing for [peace](#) and her pursuit of this lofty goal is rooted in our sacred texts and tradition going back to the very beginning of our peoplehood.

The Shabbat before Passover is called *Shabbat Hagadol* —“The Great Shabbat”—our sages have suggested several reasons for this name. First, this Shabbat is significant because it is the Shabbat in which the Jewish people set aside their lamb for the Paschal offering, on the 10th of Nisan, five days before they were to leave Egypt. The “great” miracle of the redemption began on this day and therefore it is called “The Great Shabbat.” A second answer suggests that this Shabbat earned the title *gadol*, because it was the day that the rabbis would traditionally deliver an extensive teaching related to the upcoming festival of Passover. One additional explanation is perhaps most compelling for us: The Haftarah that is traditionally chanted on this Shabbat contains the theme of the end of days in which we are told that we as a people will arrive at a “*Yom Hashem Hagadol V'hanora*”—a day of God that will be great and awesome (Malachi 3:23). This Haftarah, which contains the word *gadol*, reveals a prophecy in which peace, tranquility, and justice will prevail for all humankind. When we celebrate Passover next week, we not only reenact the redemption of the Israelites, but we envision a salvation and redemption for all humankind. The first chief rabbi of Palestine, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, taught that our redemption from Egypt was spectacular and changed the course of history because it offered the Jewish people the opportunity to bring redemption and peace to *all* people who walk this earth.

The modern state of Israel has upheld this exalted vision by extending its hand in peace to its neighbors on numerous occasions and continuously pursuing all avenues that can potentially make this dream and prophetic hope a reality. We see three critical conditions that can lead towards a lasting peace. One, a two-state solution is the clearest path to resolving this generations-old conflict: a Jewish state of Israel living in peace with a demilitarized Palestinian state along with an end to all claims. Second, as was the case in the previous Arab-Israel peace agreements, only direct talks between the parties can lead to a real and lasting peace. The United States can play an important facilitating role, but it cannot dictate the terms of peace. Third, The United States should continue to press the Arab states to start a public campaign to normalize relations with Israel and take concrete steps to support Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. These [three principles](#) can be viewed as a basic approach in which we in the Jewish community can succinctly offer our vision to our representatives in Congress, government leaders and policy makers. In this way, we give voice to our passionate support for a secure Israel that longs for peace in its land and for peace for all people across the globe. ■

The Call of the Haggadah

In every generation (Passover Haggadah)

בכל דור ודור (הגדה של פסח)

This coming Friday night, Jews across the globe will sit down to the Seder celebrating our Exodus from Egypt. In one of the most significant passages from the Haggadah, we chant: “*For not just one alone has risen against us to destroy us, but in every generation they rise against us to destroy us; and the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand.*” The story of oppression and empires and regimes who attempt to subjugate others is an ongoing story—one that we as Jews, unfortunately, know all too well. There is a part in each of us that wants to rationalize cruelty away, and not to accept that it actually exists. However, the Haggadah tells us that *does* exist, we must not close our eyes to it, and we are to do everything that we can to eradicate it from the world. Those who fail to take seriously the truth of “*b’chol dor va’dor*”—in every generation—or who deny that there are Pharaohs equivalents in our own day, may be guilty of not paying close enough attention to this painful reality.

As we turn the pages forward in the Haggadah, we come to another memorable passage that addresses the same theme, “*shfoch chamatcha al hagoyim,*”—pour out Your wrath. Some have suggested that these words are overly forceful however, if we take a second look, *Sh’foch Chamatcha* is not an expression of vengeance, but rather of justice and redemption. Our morality finds its first voice in Abraham’s words, “*Shall the judge of all the earth not deal justly?*” (Genesis 18:25). The great teacher Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook made it clear that it is *not* our hope that the wicked suffer, but rather, that the righteous prevail. The righteous cannot prevail until wickedness is eradicated. Life. Decency. Integrity. These remain our goals and our ideals.

Iran remains Israel and America’s greatest long-term threat in the Middle East. The United States must confront Iran’s aggression, take firm action to support regional allies, and fix the flaws of the 2015 Iran Nuclear Deal to ensure that Iran can never obtain nuclear weapons as the deal’s restrictions expire. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, during his recent visit to the U.S., sat down to an [interview](#) and stated that the three greatest threats to Israel are “Iran, Iran and Iran.” Netanyahu also discussed Iran in similar terms in his [speech at AIPAC](#) the other week, pressing that, to Iran, Israel is the “little Satan” standing in the way of Iran’s goal of Middle Eastern, and eventually, world domination.

Iran must understand that the United States will never permit it to acquire nuclear weapons. A nuclear-armed Iran is an existential threat to Israel and would arm the leading state sponsor of terrorism with the world’s deadliest weapon. Additionally, it should be clearly understood that Iran is a regional aggressor and continues to violate international law. Over the past two years, [Iran](#) has conducted at least 15 ballistic missile tests in defiance of the U.N. prohibition and doubled the size of its defense spending. Lastly, the Iranian regime has shown a profound disregard for human rights: Sunni and Sufi Muslims, Christians and Baha’is and others in Iran face daily persecution. Freedom of the press, of assembly and other basic human rights are regularly trampled upon by the regime, causing harm to wide swaths of Iranian society. These nefarious and dangerous actions must not be overlooked or be taken lightly. We therefore turn to our government leaders here in U.S. and ask that they insist that our government apply further sanctions and increase the pressure on Iran. A comprehensive political and economic effort against the Iranian regime is a [priority](#). We are concerned with the safety of our brethren in Israel. We are concerned with America’s wellbeing. We must remain committed to removing the threat of a regime that fosters terror, violence and that impedes progress toward establishing a world that is safe and secure for all 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.