

MARCH 5, 2018

Parashat Vayakhel-Pikudei

The Tabernacle: Building a Better World

Moses saw all the work (Exodus 39:43)

וִירָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל הַמְּלָאכָה (שמות לט:מג)

A recent [New York Times](#) investigative report revealed the scope and depth of [Iranian entrenchment](#) in Syria. Iran, through its presence in Syria, is “redrawing the strategic map of the region,” according to the Times. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has [cautioned](#) in the past weeks that Iran is “trying to take over Syria” and “moving its army into Israel’s backyard.” The Times mapped out Iranian bases and posts inside Syria, presenting a concentration of Iranian outposts along the border with Israel. The Islamic Republic is anchoring support for Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, and has increased its training and funding for terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Earlier this month at the Munich Security Conference, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [presented a piece of an Iranian drone](#) he says Israel shot down on February 10, highlighting the danger posed by Iran’s growing presence in the region.

After describing in great detail the construction of the Tabernacle, including the details of the building, frames, and sacred vessels, we read how Moses offers a special blessing. “The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses saw all the work, and behold—they had done it as the Lord had commanded. So Moses blessed them.” (Exodus 39:43) Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks points out that like many other passages in the description of the making of the Tabernacle, this echoes a line from the creation narrative: “God saw all that He had made, and behold—it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) Here we have embedded in the text a hint to the idea that the creation of the Tabernacle was a microcosm of creation.

Just as God created a world that was to be filled with goodness, kindness and mutual respect, so too, we are to follow in God’s ways. The construction of the Tabernacle by the efforts of the people of Israel teaches that through human action and intention we can create holiness and sanctity. Rabbi Sacks powerfully [states](#), “Holiness is not a property of objects, it is a property of human acts and intentions...we endow objects and places with holiness, through our intentions, our words and our deeds. There is no such thing as ontological holiness, intrinsic sanctity.” The message encoded in the construction of the Tabernacle demonstrates that we too are to construct a world that is wholesome and secure. Each of us are mandated to ensure that the world be safe from those that perpetrate violence and pursue brutality and cruelty toward the innocent and any threat to the attainment of this goal must be dealt with in the most serious way.

This message—that we have the ability to change and improve the world—is also a mandate demanding that we do our part to ensure greater peace and harmony in the world. This requires us to not only note growing threats to peace, but to take action to ensure that dangerous regimes like Iran are never permitted to reach the point where they not only threaten Israel, but global peace and stability. This can only be achieved through a [comprehensive, two-tiered approach to Iran](#): first and foremost, the United States must fix the Iran nuclear agreement. Without significant changes, Iran will have a clear path to a nuclear weapon. Secondly, we must address Iran’s aggression in the Middle East which threatens all of America’s allies in the region.

Accomplishing these goals will not be easy. They will require strong American leadership and bipartisan cooperation. And, most importantly, they require our devotion, dedication and hard work, with the understanding that like Moses, our voices have the power to bring stability, security and peace to the world.

Powerful Partnerships

And Moses blessed them (Exodus 39:43)

ויברך אותם משה (שמות לט:מג)

For decades, our elected representatives from both political parties, have been a bedrock of support for the U.S.-Israel relationship. This unique bond expresses itself in areas such as supporting aid to Israel, helping curtail Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability, supporting Israel's right to defend itself and reinforcing American policy that peace will be achieved through direct negotiations. Yet, the most important aspect of American support for Israel is the fact that it spans across the "aisle," and is strongly supported by members of both political parties.

When the building of the Tabernacle was finally completed the Jewish people were able to step back and joyously celebrate their accomplishment. The Israelites must have felt an overwhelming sense of achievement seeing before them a home for the Divine Presence to dwell in their midst. However, the Midrash states, there was one man who was distraught, Moses. Everyone amongst the Jewish people played a role in building the Tabernacle except for Moses. In the words of the Midrash: "Moses was distraught that he had not personally participated in the work of the Tabernacle. How so? The people gave the donations, and Betzalel, Ohaliav, and those with wisdom in their hearts did the handicraft. Since Moses was distraught, the Holy One, Blessed Be He, did not dwell among them, and they were not able to put it up [the Tabernacle]." Moses would be called upon to put the finishing touches on the Tabernacle by lifting its walls and standing it erect. Rabbi David Stav, when teaching this Midrash suggests that only when each and every individual, without exception, had a role to play in the building, would this place be sanctified and serve as the home for the Divine. The lesson is that we must not disenfranchise a person or a group of people. When everyone takes part and there is a true partnership in pursuing a common goal, then the potential for success is overwhelming.

We in the American Jewish community are indeed fortunate to have our government, working together, [across party lines](#), in support of the state of Israel. We should regularly relay the message to our congressman and senators that we enthusiastically support their efforts regarding Israel in areas such as fighting terrorism, military partnerships, and working together to pursue peace in the region. This past week, in one of the most important and exciting gatherings of Israel supporters, 18,000 community and student activists from all 50 states, more than half of the U.S. Senate, a third of the U.S. House of Representatives and countless Israeli and American policymakers and thought leaders convened in Washington at the AIPAC Policy Conference. This remarkable event featured some of the most significant leaders on the American political scene including Vice President Mike Pence, Ambassador David Friedman, and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, as well as numerous Israeli elected officials including Members of Knesset Tzipi Livni, Avi Gabai, and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu.

The goal of the conference is to strengthen and promote the U.S.-Israel relationship particularly by encouraging bipartisan support in Congress. In this increasingly partisan era, building a bipartisan pro-Israel consensus has become more challenging, but given the threats and the opportunities that the United States and Israel share, strong support must come from both sides of the aisle. We work hard to ensure that Israel never becomes the political agenda of any particular party. A strong Israel demands the voice of all Americans, no matter their political persuasion. Their united voices, and the strong support for Israel at this year's AIPAC Policy Conference, demonstrates that the pro-Israel community is a big tent composed of politically, racially, religiously, and geographically diverse individuals. Each of us is essential to building the lasting consensus that supports Israel. ■

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