



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 12, 2018

Parashat Vayikra - HaChodesh

Time Well Spent

These months shall be to you the beginning of months (Exodus 12:2)

החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים (שמות יב:ב)

We, as committed Jews, care deeply about our brothers and sisters in the land of Israel. For many of us, when we open our news feeds each day, we immediately check to see updates and reports regarding the latest news in Israel. Unfortunately, we often read about the numerous challenges that Israel faces and it concerns us all: Iran's nefarious actions throughout the region, including in Syria; Hamas rockets from Gaza; and the ever-present threat from Hezbollah to the north. These threats cause us to ask, as advocates for Israel what can *we* do to potentially help bring greater safety and security to our people in the Jewish homeland?

This Shabbat is *Shabbat HaChodesh*, the last of the series of four special readings during this season. The obligation to begin a count of the months was the first mitzvah given to the Israelite nation as a whole. What is the significance of this commandment and why was it given now, as the Israelites were embarking on their new lives freed from slavery? The counting of the month represents the idea of mastering time. A person who is enslaved does not have the ability to determine how to use of his own time. The slave has no "time awareness." Since the slave makes no decision regarding his use of time, time has very little significance in his life. The free person, on the other hand, is determined to master time. By choosing how to best use our time effectively we break our "servitude" to time and become its masters. The celebration at the Passover seder, which we excitedly anticipate, celebrates not only our freedom from an evil empire, but even more importantly, it celebrates the unique ability of free man and woman to be the arbiter of how one spends each day, each week, each month etc.

Time is sacred, and time must be treated with utmost sensitivity and respect. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his classic book *The Shabbat*, pointed out that even before God sanctified a place—the Land of Israel—or God sanctified an object—the tablets of stone which contained the Ten Commandments—God first sanctified *time*, "And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it..." (Genesis 2:3). There is nothing more precious than time and how we choose to use it can either endow it with holiness or it can be lost.

For those of us looking to deepen our relationship with Israel, how do we incorporate within our very full schedules the time, not only to stay current on issues happening in Israel, but to actively participate in playing part in securing and strengthening the Jewish state? One of the most effective ways to make a difference is to be involved with the work of pro-Israel activism. Take the time to write your senator or member of Congress on issues affecting the U.S.-Israel relationship. Even more than sending a letter, make the time to visit Washington as part AIPAC. The AIPAC Policy Conference that just concluded a week ago, is one of the most exciting and significant ways to be counted among Americans advocating for a strong U.S.-Israel alliance. It is not too early to commit now to freeing up time in your schedule to attend Policy Conference March 24-26, 2019—and the pre-Conference Shabbaton March 22-24—and make a difference! ■

Historic Days

And God called to Moses (Leviticus 1:1)

ויקרא אל משה (ויקרא א:א)

President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem this past December, was considered by many to have been a historic day for the U.S.-Israel relationship. A statement released by AIPAC at that time declared, "AIPAC has always supported America's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's undivided capital city, and we commend the President's momentous announcement and decision to initiate relocating the U.S. embassy there." Just over a week ago at the AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington D.C., 18,000 pro-Israel supporters were treated to hear, live and in person, the commitment of the U.S. government to follow through with this monumental plan. Those that gathered at this remarkable event were also heard the [President of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales](#), who announced that his country would follow the U.S. in relocating their embassy to Jerusalem, timing the move, as with the U.S., to coincide with the 70th anniversary of Israel's founding. It is inspiring to see other countries taking a cue from the U.S. and having the confidence to follow suit. We are hopeful that other countries from around the world will do the same in the coming months and years.

If the first two books of the Torah can be understood according to their Hebrew names—*Bereshit*, the book of "origins" and *Sh'mot*, the book of "names"—then this week we begin *Vayikra*, the book of "calling." We discover within this book a divine calling—to approach the Tent of Meeting—just as Moses did. On the one hand the word *Vayikra* refers to the call that comes from God. However, in a deeper sense, it can be understood as a calling that comes from *within* a person. Moses hears a voice that comes from above but he also hears a call that comes from his inner core. He is drawn to that which is holy. He commits himself to elucidating the laws regarding the worship in the Tabernacle that he believes will propel the people toward accomplishing their noble goal of growing closer to the Creator. Moses takes the next steps to further inspire the people to forge ahead in their journey toward the Promised Land.

Leviticus is also known in the Midrashic literature as *Torat Kohanim*, "The Instruction of the Priests." This title of the book alludes to the unique role of the leaders of the nation who motivate and uplift the nation. Judaism duly notes and salutes leaders who follow their hearts and minds with the moral strength to follow through on their convictions; trailblazers that do that which is right and lead with courage and fortitude. The two names of the third book of the Torah, *Vayikra* and *Torat Kohanim*, both highlight the unique qualities of leadership; responding to an inner calling and serving as a guide and an example to others.

Just over a week ago, at the AIPAC Policy Conference, we heard first-hand the overwhelming support and commitment to Israel from some of the most significant leaders in the United States. Vice President Mike Pence, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) all attended the AIPAC Policy Conference along with hundreds of other congressmen, senators and policy makers. One of the highlights of the event was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations [Nikki Haley's](#) address where she said, "At the U.N. and throughout the U.N. agencies, Israel does get bullied. It gets bullied because the countries that don't like Israel are used to getting away with it." Haley then told the audience, "That does not sit well with me....the U.N. spends more than half of it's time singling out one country. We will not stand for it any longer."

It is incumbent upon our community to articulate our profound appreciation for the U.S. commitment to the Jewish homeland. We must continue to foster enduring, bipartisan relationships so that our opinions and ideas will be valued and be heard. And, we must thank our elected leaders who have led by example and worked tirelessly for years to ensure that Israel remains safe and America strong. ■

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