

Who is the True Keeper of Israel, God or the IDF?

Parashat Behaalotecha



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Our Torah portion begins with discussing the menorah, which has become an important symbol of Judaism. In fact, it also serves as the symbol of the State of Israel. The olive branches to the right and to the left symbolize the desire for peace.

In addition, they are based on this passage from our haftara (the prophetic reading of the weekly Torah portion):

“He asked me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lamps on it, with seven channels to the lamps. Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left.’” – Zechariah 4:2,3 [NIV]

Further on, we find the well-known verse from Zechariah:

“... ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.” – Zechariah 4:6b [NIV]

The apostle Saul interprets this verse to say that it is not by man's power, but by the spirit of God:

“It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” – Romans 9:16 [NIV]

The Importance of Israel’s National Symbol

Today we can attribute this interpretation also to the State of Israel - not by might nor by power, but by the spirit of God, the State of Israel lives!

The famous Arch of Titus depicts the Roman Legion bearing the spoils after the looting of the Temple. Above everything else you can easily spot the menorah. It's considered to be an “Arch of Triumph.”

It's interesting that the State of Israel chose the menorah as its national symbol. It is taken from the moment of the Roman victory, precisely the symbol associated with that low point, with exile and the destruction of the Temple.

Here we need to understand that the menorah from the Arch of Titus is only loot, a piece of the spoils, and an expression of a momentary sense of power that rests on the back of a few soldiers.

Scripture reminds us, “not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.” Today we are here, being warmed by the light of that same menorah, which is our national symbol. As for the Romans, they're gone with the wind.

Who is the True Keeper of Israel?

This raises the question, “Who is the true keeper of Israel?”

Every Saturday we as a messianic congregation in Jerusalem, pray for the protection and strengthening of the soldiers of the State of Israel. However, who is the true guardian of Israel, God or IDF soldiers?

It would be easy to say that God is the true guardian of Israel, case closed. In that case, we can go home and wait for God to come with a strong hand to guard and deliver us. Such an interpretation was accepted when the State of Israel was established.

In 1948, many opposed immigrating to Israel or helping to re-establish the state, because they believed that God was the true guardian of Israel and of the Jewish people. It was the Messiah's job to re-establish the Land of Israel, not a task for us humans.

In their opinion, the fact that we took action, and did not wait for God or for the Messiah, actually prevents God from working - and therefore there will be no blessing. That was their way of thinking, and they were wrong.

God Expects Us to Act

I believe that God uses human beings to carry out His will. We are merely the instruments to be used by Him.

We tend to focus on the gifts from above such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, or teaching. Whereas, the rest of human abilities we see as a limitation, that we rely on our own power and do not rely on God. We are taught not to count on our abilities, but to rely on God alone.

It's a nice idea, but the truth is that God created all of us with many gifts and talents, with the ability to think on our own, with a healthy and intelligent mind, with the ability to plan, calculate, and innovate.

God gave us all these gifts... including our two hands, for the purpose of using them. I believe that God's expectation of us is that we make, think, create, act, and innovate - because that way we use the gifts that God gave us.

Just like a teacher who teaches, or a prophet who prophesies, or a worship leader who sings.

Who Defeated Goliath? God or David?

When God created man, He created it him in order to preserve and maintain all of creation. We see this in Genesis.

God created us with a particularly high level of adaptability, with survival ability, ingenuity, and personal ability, higher than any other creation. Again, with the goal of developing in us an attitude to use all the gifts God gave us for good.

This idea is true for every aspect of our lives, and the lives of those around us. This idea holds true for the true guardian of Israel.

Yes, God is the guardian of Israel, and His will is done, for better or for worse. However, throughout history, God used people to carry out his plan. God used David to win wars and conquer the land.

Who defeated Goliath? God or David?

The correct answer is that God beat Goliath by the hand of David:

“This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.” – 1 Samuel 17:46 [NIV]

The Morality of the IDF

If we see the picture in this light, then in fact the Israel Defense Forces are the emissaries of God. They are the guardians of Israel, as an extension of the arm of God.

Occasionally, when Israel or the IDF is mentioned in the world news, it is usually not in a positive light. It is my duty to raise the truth about Israel and the IDF.

I believe in the IDF, we are an extraordinarily moral army. I have not encountered problems of looting, even if this happens occasionally in the press. In civilian life, there is theft from time to time, and that is why we have police.

I am thankful that, in my years of service in the IDF, I have never encountered any instance of looting. The same things goes for rape. As of today, I have never heard of any instance of a case or complaint about an act of rape in the IDF.

I raise these two points, because these are the first two things that an army throughout human history tends to do. The morality of the IDF does not end with these two points. We believe in the sanctity of life.

The Morality of the Individual Soldier

The extensive use made by terrorist organizations in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, of human shields - by locating their headquarters and their means of dispatch within a civilian population, inside schools and hospitals - is in itself indicative of their own belief in the high level of morality of the IDF.

Otherwise, there would be no use in using human shields.

Finally, at the end of the chain, stands the lone soldier. His or her level of morality, “humanity”, sensitivity to the suffering of others, commitment to prevent destruction and unnecessary damage - these are dictated by his or her personal education.

I believe that as a people we suffered greatly at the hands of others, and we are careful not to harm others. An additional aspect is the learning of the Torah. As a people, we are based on the Torah and its inherent morality.

I am proud of this symbol of the State of Israel as well as of the IDF soldiers. But it is still important to remember:

“... ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.” - Zechariah 4:6b [NIV]

God’s Word is a Light for the World

Over everything rules a sovereign God and indeed we are all but tools in His hands.

The whole idea of this article, is that God is sovereign.

Our first course of action should always be to align ourselves with Scripture, with the spirit of His word. This idea is similar to the instruction of Yeshua the Messiah, to seek first the Kingdom of God.

This is our purpose, and towards this we are marching:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” - Matthew 6:33 [NIV]

Our parasha begins with the menorah:

“Speak to Aaron and say to him, ‘When you set up the lamps, see that all seven light up the area in front of the lampstand.’” – Numbers 8:2 [NIV]

The candles in the Temple menorah were directed inward, towards the middle candle. The light did not disperse in all directions but rather converged, and that is how it managed to illuminate the world.

We are a Light as Well

The same goes for us. If we focus on our inner being, we will succeed in being a lighthouse.

What does it mean to focus on your inner being? Focus on your faith, on integrity, trustworthiness, loyalty, love, caring for others, and joy.

Focus on these qualities and develop them, work on them, maintain and strengthen them, these are our business cards.

If we focus on the idea that candles must be turned inwards, it must also include criticism. If we want to give criticism, let's start with ourselves.

But before we begin to sink into self-criticism we need to find balance, to find the watershed. God forbid that self-criticism becomes something that breaks and destroys us, instead of its original intention to improve and build.

The Need for Balance in Criticism

In our parasha there is reference to criticism, negative criticism in particular, which neither builds nor helps.

The people of Israel complained and criticized Moses, it was incessant. These internal struggles are worse than Pharaoh, the Red Sea, and Amalek.

In the face of external enemies we are united, we are strong, we have the strength and motivation. But in the face of internal enemies, we struggle and suffer from them until death.

I want to share one of Moses' responses to the incessant criticism and crying of the people of Israel:

“I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me...” – Numbers 11:14,15a [NIV]

People, even leaders, are all human beings in the end. They cannot withstand constant criticism and whining, there's a limit.

The Need for Encouragement

As believers, and as students of the Torah, we must examine ourselves and understand that constant whining is not a positive option, not in the community, not at work, and not at home.

In fact, the home is perhaps the worst place because we feel free to whine there. We live with the same people for many years in the same house, and here we must learn from the lesson of the Jewish people, and internalize the importance of a positive attitude.

At some point, we should emphasize the good aspects of ourselves. This comes in the place of pointing out what is wrong with someone else.

By showing others love, joy, patience, attentiveness, and understanding, we can illuminate the world, by the light of the Messiah that is within us.

People are so thirsty for listening, for compassion, for pleasant words, for appreciation, but at the same time, we all fall into the trap of judgment and criticism.

What Have We Done to Make Things Better?

Here we go back to the beginning, to the fact that our candles must shine inwardly, we start with ourselves, is there any criticism for us? Let's start there; what have we done to improve or correct ourselves?

Rabbi Kook wrote:

“The pure righteous do not complain of the dark, but increase the light; they do not complain of evil, but increase justice; they do not complain of heresy, but increase faith; they do not complain of ignorance, but increase wisdom.” – Rabbi Kook

What does this mean? That it is not wise to go against stupidity, or against evil, or against the obnoxious, anyone can do that.

The great wisdom is to increase good and to correct. Not to go out against someone, but to add your own truth.

May we have a peaceful Shabbat, filled with the light of the Messiah,
Shabbat shalom U'mevorach.

The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua *in a Jewish Context*

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