

SHABBAT SERMON
Parashat Eiqev
5775

About a year ago, I made a small change in our liturgy. On the opening page of the Amidah, it's the practice in all congregations during the fall and winter months to add the words *mashiv haru-ach umorid hagashem*, "Who brings the wind and makes the rain fall." The words refer to the rainy season in Israel, roughly between November and April, where rainfall is essential to the strength of the crops. Until recently, it was the practice in only in Israel and in S'phardi congregations to recite different words - *morid hatal*, "Who makes the dew fall" - during the summer months. About a year ago, I incorporated those words into our liturgy as well. Throughout the year, we pray for the immediate welfare of the land of Israel.

Not only here. In this week's parashah, we have the proof text, the scriptural basis for saying Birkat Hamazon, the blessing after meals. The verse says,

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall praise the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.”

Even when we live outside the land and our food is grown around the world, when we say Birkat Hamazon we are reminded of Eretz Yisrael and all it gives us.

Our liturgy and calendar were developed to keep us closely tied to the Land of Israel whether we lived there or not.

Despite all this, despite the fact that for centuries the Jewish people longed for a return to the land, in the late-1800s when the Zionist movement was beginning, both the leader

of the Hasidic community, Sholom Dov Ber Schneerson of Lubavitch, and the leader of the Mitnaged, the anti-Hasidic community, Rabbi Chayim Soloveitchik of Volozhin, ardently opposed it. Until the messiah came, it was a sacrilege to create a political state of Israel. Fortunately, the world Jewish community disagreed. **No longer were we going to be passive about our destiny. We would not wait for the messiah to come. We would take the life of the Jewish people into our own hands.**

- We were not strong enough to save the Jewish people of Europe 50 years later. But we had laid the ground work for the founding of the state and its development.

The Zionist writer Moshe Hess wrote in the 1860s, “Be not vanquished.” Never again would we be passive, especially when it came to our homeland. That activism has been a good thing.

I am proudest of Israel when tens of thousands of people show up in Rabin Square to protest something. I am proud – though I don't always agree – when an Israeli has an editorial in the New York Times criticizing something that has happened in Israel. Unlike others, **we don't celebrate; we don't look the other way; we don't remain silent - when someone in our own community has done wrong. We speak up. We air our dirty linen in public. That is what keeps us healthy and democratic and Jewish. Jewish activism, even when directed against ourselves, is a good thing.**

Etgar Keret, an Israeli writer, had a piece in the Times saying that there were too few people in Rabin Square last Saturday night after the murders of Shira Banki, the 16-year-old who was stabbed at the Jerusalem gay pride parade, and Ali Dawabsheh, the 16-month-old whose West Bank home was fire-bombed. Keret wrote that his 10-year-old son kept ask-

ing, “When will all the people come?” But the crowd did not come.

Jewish passivity is not a good thing. Whether we’re challenging the actions of others, those that threaten us; or challenging the actions of our own people that threaten our spirit, whether we live in Tel Aviv or in Fort Myers, remaining silent is not what keeps Jews and Judaism alive.

I’ve always believed that, even after 1948, building the State of Israel was a project of the entire Jewish people – those who live there and those of us who do not. Ben Osterman leaves this week for a year there. Among the things he learns when he’s there, I hope one of them is that the building of the State is his responsibility too. Wherever he chooses to live – being a child of Rozzi and John that’s a fair question – I hope he learns that the life of our people is tied up with the welfare of that land – as it has always been.