

Shabbat Parashat B'har-B'hukotai  
“We are but Strangers”

We are given the gift of a double *parasha* once again this week as we complete our reading of Leviticus/*VaYikra*, the third of the Five Books of Moses. The first of the two *parashiyot*, *parashat B'har* contains several new *mitzvot*/commandments for the Israelites, still gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. Among these are the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, which are intended – first and foremost – to remind us that we are living on an earth that belongs ultimately to God. Every seventh and fiftieth year, the earth is to experience a complete rest without the planting or harvesting of crops, among other rules and regulations. Serving as a thematic summary to this section of instructions is God's reminder to us that we are but strangers on the earth, no matter how comfortable we may be or feel at a given time, and that we must always remember that the earth is the Lord's in all that we do.

This concept of being the “comfortable stranger” is a powerful and very relevant one for us. All over the world, Jews are once again experiencing the challenge of anti-Semitism, disrespect, and rejection. Here in Canada, where incidents of this kind are fewer and more muted, it is difficult to feel connected to the on-going “suffering” of our people. However, whether you are a Jewish student on a college campus experiencing anti-Semitism under the guise of academic freedom or a Jew in Europe dealing with overt anti-Semitism in your city or town as a result of an overwhelming Islamic fundamentalist influence on government, we are talking about the same animal, only with different markings. The major difference for the international Jewish community in the last two generations when it comes to responding to and dealing with anti-Semitism is the State of Israel, the one place where we will never be treated as strangers. It is our duty to show our solidarity with and support for Israel whenever possible and to support our government leaders who stand up for Israel when they do so.

A little more than two weeks ago, an op-ed article which praised Prime Minister Stephen Harper's staunch support of Israel appeared in the Toronto Sun. The article was co-written by Rabbi Abraham Cooper and Prof. Harold Brackman of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and was a response to PM Harper's stand against the anti-Semitic shadow that was cast over the Durban II “anti-racism” conference in Switzerland. With the leaders of European nations refusing to do likewise as a result of the pressure put on them by their Muslim citizens, our Prime Minister spoke publicly and directly of the hypocrisy embedded within the conference. U.S. President Obama then followed up on PM Harper's comments with echoing condemnations of his own. If you are interested in reading the op-ed article, please click on the following link: <http://www.torontosun.com/comment/2009/04/23/9212851-sun.html>.

Prime Minister Harper's support for the State of Israel deserves to be recognized and merits the gratitude of Canada's Jewish community. While it is important that we find our own ways to be supportive of Israel on a regular basis, this week's *parasha* must also motivate us to act in response to the stand that our Prime Minister and our government has taken for Israel as well. It will not take a great deal of your time, but will mean a great deal! Over this Victoria Day long weekend, take a moment to write to our Prime Minister to thank him for his support of the State of Israel. You can contact his office in the following ways:

Email: [pm@pm.gc.ca](mailto:pm@pm.gc.ca)

Direct Mail: Office of the Prime Minister, 80 Wellington Street, Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A2

Fax: 613-941-6900

Our voices in support of our government's Middle East policies will make a difference for the Jewish State, which we are fortunate to be able to call our own.