

## RE'EH 2022/5782

This week's portion, Re-eh, begins with Moses saying to the people of Israel, "I place before you today a blessing and a curse"—the blessing that will come when they fulfill G-d's commandments, and the curse if they abandon them.

A Temple is to be built in "the place that G-d will choose to make dwell His name there," where the people should bring their sacrifices to Him. The rules for keeping Kosher are repeated.

Reading from our portion, "For there will never cease to be needy in the land. Therefore I command you saying 'you shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor one, and to the needy in your land' (Deut 15:11). Our sages tell us that this verse is the source of the commandment that we continuously perform acts of kindness, Tzedukah and Chesed. In addition, on the Sabbatical year, all loans are to be forgiven and all indentured servants also are to be set free.

Our Parshah concludes with the laws of the three pilgrimage festivals—Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot—when all are to "see and be seen" before G-d in the Holy Temple.

Last week I listened to two interesting podcasts related to Israel. They involve much more recent historical aspects of the promised land that Moses is preparing the people to enter.

The first is the ***Counterbalance Podcast*** interview of Walter Russell Mead discussing his new book, "ARC OF A COVENANT". Mead's book provides a detailed look at the origins of the US Israel relationship and how that relationship is based on mutual values that predate both the American declaration of independence and the establishment of the modern state of Israel. The author makes it clear that this unique relationship is not "about the Benjamins" as Ilan Omar said. In fact, the relationship existed long before Representative Omar was born.

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The common perception is that US support for Israel is the result of American Jewish lobbying, especially by AIPAC, and of the influence of American Jewish money. Mead makes it clear that this perception is wrong and that the source of the relationship is much more complicated than most people know.

A brief look at the three prior US administrations' relationship with Israel makes this obvious. A significant majority of American Jews strongly opposed both the Iraq war and the Bush presidency. But that administration validated much of Israel's policy in Gaza and Judea and Samaria.

Jews overwhelmingly supported President Obama. His policies toward Israel turned out less favorable than those of his predecessor. These included the infamous UN Resolution 2334 that precluded Jewish construction in East-Jerusalem and the Iran deal that was not even able to obtain approval of Congress.

And most American Jews deeply disliked President Trump, although he took more pro-Israel actions than any President since President Truman.

Whatever influence American Jews and their political contributions have, it does not seem to translate into a consistent pro-Israel foreign policy. So where did the US Israel relationship really start?

It goes back to 1891. Five years before Theodore Herzl wrote, *Der Judenstaat*, *The Jewish State*, and 60 years before AIPAC was formed, a largely unknown meeting took place in the White House, then occupied by President Benjamin Harrison.

In March of that year, a devout Christian, William Eugene Blackstone, met with Secretary of State Blaine and President Harrison. At that meeting, Blackstone presented a document known as *The Blackstone Memorial*, "a petition asking President Harrison to use his influence to persuade European leaders to prevail upon the Ottoman sultan to open the province of Palestine

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for Jewish settlement and the creation of a Jewish national home.” (1)

This petition was signed by John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and over 400 prominent, mostly-non-Jewish financiers, public officials, journalists and politicians. This became the foundation of President Truman's vote in favor of the formation of the state of Israel decades later.

I also commend last week's edition of Dan Senor's podcast, **Call Me Back**. Senor interviews Israeli writer and journalist, Matti Friedman. Friedman just published a book titled, "Who By Fire: Leonard Cohen in the Sinai." The book describes the largely unknown story of singer, songwriter and poet, Leonard Cohen's unannounced appearance in Israel at the start of the Yom Kippur war.

Cohen always maintained a strong Jewish identity and commitment to Israel. In 1973 he was living on a small island in Greece when war broke out. He decided to go to Israel to do what he could to help. But he did not consider playing music—he did not even bring a guitar with him.

But in an act of kindness that our sages would have found consistent with the commands of Re'eh, Cohen spent the war entertaining troops in the Sinai, using a borrowed guitar.

Senor's podcast also discusses the recent flare up in Gaza, the state of relations in the larger Mideast and particularly the idea that ***the Palestinian Israeli conflict is no longer an Arab-Israeli conflict, but largely an Iranian-Israeli conflict***. It is well worth an hour.

Have a good week.

## SOURCES

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(1) Mead, Walter Russell. *The Arc of a Covenant* (p. 234). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition; *See also*, Oren, Michael B. *Power Faith and Fantasy* (p. 278-279).

*The Arc of a Covenant*, Counterbalance Podcast, August 11, 2022, (<https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cHM6Ly9mZWVkcyc5zaW1wbGVjYXN0LmNvbS9LNVJUZmhrQw/episode/NzQwMGI1ZjctODQ2OS00ZWUxLTg0MmEtMDg3Yzk1NDY3YTVI?hl=en&ved=2ahUKEwiR-4OB8NX5AhXxHDQIHdqCOUQjrKEegQIAhAI&ep=6>)

*Who By Fire, Call Me Back* Podcast, August 18, 2022, (<https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cHM6Ly9mZWVkcyc5zaW1wbGVjYXN0LmNvbS81Z3pNbE9HMQ/episode/OGZIMGYzMWQtM2UyMi00NWl0LThhMmUtODAwNWMyNjEyMjc3?hl=en&ved=2ahUKEwiHh4iHsNb5AhUKGzQIHdX5AgIQjrKEegQIAhAF&ep=6>)

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