

This Week in Torah *Naso*

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It is time for Israel to count. As the *Omer* (sheaves of wheat counted from Passover) comes to a close with the holiday of *Shavuot*, Torah records the instruction for Israelites to lift up (*naso*) their heads and be counted for service to protect and defend the people. And here we are, thousands of years later and in a different land, being asked to do the same. *Naso*—it is time for us to stand up and be counted as *Chovevei Tzion*, true lovers and supporters of Israel. We who reside in America must acknowledge with unabashed pride that we care and support Israel. There should be no shame in that—even as public opinion is raising its ugly rhetoric against Israel and many are distorting facts to portray the government and citizens of Israel as something they are not—genocidal, racist murderers of Palestinians. *Naso*—we are connected to Israel.

Naso—I stand and proclaim my love for Israel. For me, that place is more than a safe haven for Jews. It is the theological center of my Jewishness; the tangible manifestation of God's side of the covenantal bargain—we accept the responsibility of the commandments and God sheds Divine providence especially in the land of Israel. It is a place where Jewish *middot* (values and attributes) have the potential to come into fruition—a work that is in process, often frustrating but with incredible sacred potential. I am a Zionist—no doubt about that. I am a *Chovev Tzion*, a true supporter of Israel who lives in America.

Naso—I stand for Israel because of the deep emotional bonds that I have there. I do so for my nephews David and Avishai who serve proudly in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). I do so for my niece Chava and her family whose religious faith is rooted in a very traditional observance. I do so for my sister-in-law Ellen and her husband Eli who are teachers of the next generation as well as homeowners in Zikron Ya'akov on Israel's northern coast. I do so for Matthew who made Aliyah after he converted to Judaism under my auspices. I do so for Erica who grew up in our synagogue and now lives in Ber Sheba with her husband and two sons. I do for Andrea and Ed's son Zach and his wife Stephanie and their children who live in Netanya. I do so for all my friends who live

there—from Alan and his family in Talpiyot to Faiz and his family who live in East Jerusalem. I do so for those whose names I do not know but yearn to reside in peace and freedom. *Naso*—they need me to speak loudly and proudly for their wellbeing and safety.

Naso—to stand up and be counted on as part of the *Chovevei Tsion* does not mean that we should see Israel in black-or-white terms. No, the complexities of issues here cannot permit that. There are no political forces in the ongoing cycle of violence that is without culpability. To label one as the perpetrator and the other a victim is far from the truth. But instead of blaming—let's demand violence to stop. Rockets must stop coming from Gaza. Israel must stop military strikes in return. Jewish mobs cannot seek to beat up Israeli Arabs. And Palestinians cannot assault Jews traveling to and from their homes. Hamas cannot exploit Palestinians as human shields for political gain. The Israeli government must do more to treat Israeli Arab citizens fairly as well as Palestinian Arabs justly. To make sure that the Iranian nuclear threat is known and held at the top of the US foreign policy agenda. To be a true friend to Israel is to support her as the media distorts reality, as liberal US politicians chastise her unfairly.

Naso—let's stand together and demand peace. To do so let's use the sacred benediction as a guide:

The LORD bless you and protect you! –with friendship rooted in respect and peace.

The LORD deal kindly and graciously with you!

The LORD bestow Divine favor upon you and grant you peace!

Thus they shall link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them. We link our names with the people of Israel when we stand proudly for Israel—whether advocating for her or constructively correcting policies.

Naso—stand up and be counted... please.