

Ki Tisa "When you Enumerate" / כִּי תִסָּא

February 27, 2016

Israel: A Religious State or a State with Religion?

This Week's Text:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵּדַרְדֹּר כִּי שָׁחַת עַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הֵעַלִיתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם

Ex 32:7 *And Adonai spoke to Moses: 'Go, get down; for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have dealt corruptly...'*

וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת-פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה יְהוָה יַחַרְה אֶפְדֶּךָ בְּעַמְּךָ
אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכַח גְּדוֹל וּבְיַד חֲזָקָה

Ex 32:11 *And Moses implored Adonai his God, and said: 'Adonai, let not your anger blaze forth to Your people, whom you delivered out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand.'*

Linking our text to Modern Israel:

Like parents who want to distance themselves from disobedient children, God speaks to Moses referring to the people as “your people” and in response Moses points out to God, this is “Your people.” The biblical exchange represents an ongoing tension. Do the Israelites represent a “Divine creation” or are they a community of people based on geographic location and cultural norms? Furthermore, how has the Jewish people evolved with this dichotomous identity? And, finally how has the founding of the State of Israel continued to shape that question?

After the UN voted to partition Mandatory Palestine in November of 1947, thereby sanctioning the creation of a Jewish State, David Ben-Gurion convened a small group tasked with drafting the Declaration of Independence. Disagreements regarding content and wording ensued. How much should the document contain ancient scriptural references? The religious Zionists wanted the Declaration to cite God’s name. Those aligned with the socialist movements, representing the majority of Zionists, wanted no mention of God, instead advocating for wording that balanced contemporary and traditional ideals. These leaders wrote into the Declaration of Independence that Israel was to be a country “...based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel”... “it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.” The final document reflects a compromise: “[Israel is] the birthplace of the Jewish people; our spiritual religious and political identity was shaped here....” And at the conclusion, “with trust in the Rock of Israel” referencing the name of God.

Discussion Questions:

1. What role should religion take in Israel society and how do Israel’s decisions on religion impact us in the diaspora?
2. How does the ongoing controversy surrounding חוקי הַשְּׁבוּת - the Law of Return - impact Jews inside and outside the State of Israel?

Additional References:

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs:
[The Judiciary: The Court System](#)

[The Basic Law for Human Dignity and Liberty](#)

Rabbi Judah Leib Maimon (nee Fishman) was determined to insert God’s name in the Declaration. Unable to do so in the content, he found a way to do so in his [signature](#)

