

An Ecumenical Sermon for Shabbat 250 by Presidential Proclamation for Jewish American Enrichment Month

By Rabbi Yehoshua Mizrahi

Isaiah 56:7 calls the Holy Temple in Jerusalem a House of Prayer for all people. Until the Temple is restored—may it be speedily in our days—the synagogue serves as a “Mikdash Me’at,” a small sanctuary that stands in its place for now. For that reason, this House of G-d is open to all and welcomes everyone in prayer. I warmly welcome our guests, some who have traveled for hours to join us this Shabbat.

A SHABBAT — FOR AMERICA —

As part of the White House's Jewish American Heritage Month proclamation, President Donald Trump designated the period from sundown Friday, May 15, through nightfall Saturday, May 16, as a national Shabbat, dubbed "Shabbat 250."

“ In special honor of 250 glorious years of American independence and on the weekend of Rededicate 250 — a national jubilee of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving — Jewish Americans are encouraged to observe a national Sabbath,” the President wrote. “From sundown on May 15 to nightfall on May 16, friends, families, and **communities of all backgrounds may come together in gratitude for our great Nation.** This day will recognize the sacred Jewish tradition of setting aside time for rest, reflection, and gratitude to the Almighty.” ”

— You Are Warmly Invited to Join Us —
Saturday, May 16, 2026 at 10:00 am

For a Universal Shabbat of
**Prayer, Reflection,
Unity and Gratitude to G-d**



📍 B'nai Israel Congregation
1829 N. 9th Street, Pensacola

🥂 Kiddush Reception to Follow

RSVPs are required at
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Last Shabbat, we concluded the Book of Leviticus in our weekly

reading cycle. This week's Torah reading, the opening of the fourth book of the Torah, Bamidbar – meaning “in the desert” – describes the census of the Jewish People taken at the foot of Mount Sinai, just prior to our headlong thrust to claim our inheritance, the Land of Israel.

Census-taking. Unpronounceable names. Number crunching. Headcounts. The material is...well...a bit dry; homiletically speaking. But, if we dig a little deeper, we will find treasures below the surface of the narrative.

This census of the encampment at Mount Sinai was taken on the first day of the month Iyar in the Hebrew calendar. Iyar corresponds to our month of May. It was the second year of our departure from Egypt. You will recall that we left Egypt in April. In those twelve plus months, we had come a long way in a noticeably brief period.

We departed from Egypt as an undisciplined rabble; it was a scene of barely controlled chaos. One can easily imagine the frenzy of the departure: three million people running, screaming, arms waving wildly in the air; the strong moving faster, the weak falling behind, parents desperately trying to keep their families together amid the craziness/“balagan” in Hebrew- mules, donkeys, horses, oxen, camels, wagons – all moving at their own pace. The Torah records that the cowardly Amalekites attacked the stragglers: the oldest, weakest and most weary of assembly.

Our weekly Torah parsha, “Bamidbar,” the Hebrews had come a long way. We received the Torah from G-d at Mount Sinai – an ethical/legal code unparalleled in the history of human civilization before or since; one which guides our conduct to this very day. We have functioning judiciary and appellate courts. We have an executive triumvirate in the form of Moshe, his brother Aharon the High Priest and his sister Miriam.

We established an orderly community: three concentric circles

composed of the Mishkan-the Tabernacle in the center of the camp, surrounded by Machaneh Levi'im/the Levite encampment, in turn surrounded by Machaneh Yisrael/ the Israelite encampment, organized by tribe, clan and family, each with its own standard fluttering proudly in the breeze.

We have an order of march – never again will the weak and the stragglers be left behind. We have an efficient system for disassembling, transporting, and reassembling the Mishkan, itself a marvel of ancient engineering. We have a system of camp-wide communications with the shofarot – ram's horns- and the silver trumpets.

And most important of all, we have the Shechinah, the palpable, dwelling presence of the Almighty in our midst, with a pillar of cloud to lead us by day, and a pillar of fire to lead us by night.

We had come a long way.

Our work at Sinai was completed. In the space of a year, we produced order out of chaos and built a functioning society. We were ready to go, to begin our campaign to reclaim the Land of Israel. The Land that God promised to Abraham, to Isaac & to Jacob and their descendants as an eternal heritage.

However, before we move out, we take stock. We do a head count; we take a moment to reflect on where we have been and where we are before we write the next chapter of the history of the Jewish people.

This Shabbat, we pause to take stock of our American Jewish journey as we approach the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. We also open our doors today to welcome our neighbors and friends, coming together to worship together and lift our voices, united in prayer, that G-d Almighty should continue to shower His blessings upon the United States of America.

We are grateful that the President of the United States, with observant Jewish grandchildren, has declared May 2026 Jewish American Heritage Month, focusing on the many contributions and sacrifices American Jews have made to the tapestry of this great nation.

Among the earliest Jews to reach these shores were 15 Spanish & Portuguese families who arrived in Newport, Rhode Island in 1658, only 38 years after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. Their families had fled to South America after the Spanish Expulsion in 1492. Unfortunately, the Inquisition followed the flag, and Jews were not secure in territories controlled by the Spanish and Portuguese. These exiles moved to Curacao, which was then under Dutch control and beyond the reach of the Dominican and Franciscan Inquisitors. However, when the Portuguese conquered Curacao, the families took a huge chance on the invitation from the colony of Rhode Island's founder Roger William, an advocate for religious freedom. These refugee Jews brought with them a Torah Scroll written in 1492 on deerskin parchment when they settled in the colony of Rhode Island. These were the first Jewish families established the famous Touro Synagogue where the 1492 Torah scroll is still on display there. Those Spanish and Portuguese Jews were "our" Pilgrims.

After Shabbat services, I hope to call upon people to share their families' stories about coming to America and their experiences as growing up as Jewish-Americans.

Like the census at the foot of Mount Sinai, the 250th anniversary celebrations are an excellent opportunity to step back and reflect upon the values of this country, values that all we hold dear. Values that made the American Jewish experience qualitatively different than any other diaspora since we were exiled from our homeland by the cruel Romans in the year 135 C.E.

Unique in the history of Western Civilization, the United

States was founded upon Torah principles: that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; of the G-d-given universal rights of man; and of equal justice under the law.

G-d has blessed the United States with abundant blessings in fulfillment of the famous verse in Genesis 12:3: Those who bless you will be blessed, and those who curse you will be cursed, and through you and your descendants, the entire world will be blessed. American power, influence, and abundance are an expression of Divine favor, bestowed for the welcoming way America has treated its Jewish citizens. For this we are deeply grateful.

America has been an ally of the State of Israel since the 1960's. Israel is not just another nation-state, it is the first sprouting of the Ultimate Redemption of mankind, for, through the ingathering of the exiles and the restoration of Jewish Sovereignty in the Holy Land, the entire world will be redeemed.

In the immediate aftermath of the miraculous Six Day war, President Johnson and Premier Alexei Kosygin held a Summit in Glassboro, New Jersey on June 25, 1967. Kosygin pointedly asked Johnson: "Why do you support a small country of 2.5 million Jews against a Moslem world of 500 million?" Johnson answered back, "Because it's the right thing to do."

President Johnson's response was the quintessentially American answer.

The United States makes common cause with the State of Israel because of shared Judeo-Christian values, a shared worldview, and, unfortunately, a shared rogue's gallery of common enemies. Today, Israel and the United States are fighting together to dislodge the evil Iranian regime. Without exaggeration or hyperbole, the Islamic regime are the Nazis of

the 21st century. Their goals are identical: the eradication of Jews and Judaism from the face of the earth, world domination and the imposition of Sharia law, and nuclear blackmail.

Let us pray that the efforts of the United States Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Force prove successful. May the Iranian people be liberated from the oppression of religious coercion and once again determine their own political and economic future. Because liberating them is the right thing to do.

Back home, we are experiencing a renascent Jew-hatred in the United States from both the extreme right and the extreme left. Left unchecked, given what we are witnessing in England and Western Europe, we risk losing the Divine Protections that G-d has showered on this great nation since its inception.

I appeal to you today: join with us in the fight against the mainstreaming of antisemitism in all its forms, not out of compassion or pity, but to ensure the continued cascade of blessings upon America from Heaven above. Because it is the right thing to do.

As we stand on the threshold of 250 years of the American republic, we must concede that our country has profound economic and social problems that need to be solved. Prime most are the metastatic sovereign debt, the growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots, and competing visions of what the American melting pot should look like. I have every confidence that, working together, we can fix these vexing problems of our times. The extremists may grab all the headlines. However, I am persuaded that the broad swath of middle America has more common sense than most pundits give them credit and, Americans seek to do the right thing.

The Republic will endure. I declare to you today that America's best days still lie ahead.