

Israel's Liquid Resources Connect Us to the Bible

Passover is known as the festival of freedom, but this also is the seasonal holiday of spring. Living in Israel, my family feels tied deeply to the land in a way that's unique when celebrating the biblically ordained festivals.

According to the seasons, Passover officially marks the transition from the cold, winter, rainy months to spring and summer's hot and dry months. Israel being very much an agrarian society—albeit one that has made the desert bloom in the modern era as no country ever has—our prayers change from asking God to bring the rain and wind to provide dew when Passover begins.

Since 2004, I have had a much deeper connection to, and awareness of, the need for the land to be blessed literally—with the issue of water running deep. This makes my prayers for rain (or dew) very meaningful, and even emotional.

No matter where we are, when Jews pray for rain, we pray for rain (or dew) in Israel. We understand abundant rain is a blessing from God and that our actions play a direct role in His bestowing rain in its season. So when we stop praying for rain, I pause to reflect whether I have done enough to affect this outcome or have wasted water throughout the year.

It's very personal, and I get a lump in my throat—wondering, reflecting and deep in prayer: *Has the Sea of Galilee been replenished, and are our aquifers full enough to get us through the dry months until October or November?*

This year, something new happened. Israeli experts announced that we had “beaten the drought.” This declaration was not just a result of a relatively rainy winter—clearly an answer to our prayers—but also Israel having crossed a threshold to

desalinate enough water from the Mediterranean Sea to provide for the country's needs. While this declaration may have been premature and immodest, as one of the world leaders in desalination and recycling waste water, that too is a miracle for which to be thankful and aware.

God gave us a land that is deeply connected to the abundance of rain. Being aware of that makes us humble and personally accountable, not just in our actions and prayers to bring rain, but also in being sure not to waste the water we are given.

This year, I started to think about Israel's other liquid resources and how deeply they connect us to the Bible.

Another liquid resource with deep biblical roots is wine. Also connecting us to the land, the grape harvest is something in which we are able to participate as volunteers to lend a helping hand, literally, to Israel's internationally acclaimed wine industry.

In Judaism, wine has always been part of many a ritual. Today, we have grown from an era of storing wine in clay vessels to becoming one of the leading wine-producing countries of the world, with some Israeli wines winning international awards—and they are kosher too.

Of course, like any crop, wine is dependent on the vine receiving the right amount of rain at the right time, something enhanced by Israel's state-of-the-art drip irrigation. The grape vine in my yard does more than simply yield fruit. It connects us to the land.

By the same token, when the Bible speaks of oil, it's an agricultural product—olive oil—also used ritually and connecting the land and the Book. Olive trees thrive here because they don't require lots of water. The trees, the fruit and the oil are deeply symbolic and religiously relevant. I love using olive oil to light my Chanukah menorah every year,

rather than the more common box of brightly colored candles. It's another way of connecting me to the land.

Generally, when we speak of oil, we think more of the price per barrel, of OPEC having us over a barrel and of the cost to make our car run. There's a joke that if Moses had only turned the other direction, Israel would be sitting on billions of barrels of this oil, and yet we are rightly in awe of our achievements despite not having oil.

Until recently.

Widely believed to have no significant oil reserves, Israel has learned in the past several years that God bestowed on us no small amount of shale oil and natural gas that have the ability to make us an exporter—and certainly not reliant on the goodwill of the international market. Egypt's cutting off that supply underscores this. This week, pumping from one of the underwater fields began.

The last of the precious liquid resources Israel needs also has deep biblical roots: blood. Blood is the only resource, however, that cannot and does not rely on God giving the ingenuity, abundance or natural resource to sustain it. To sustain Israel's blood supply requires a generous and selfless human act. Since blood has a limited shelf life, it requires a constant flow of people taking time to donate.

Over the past several years, we have seen a new reality emerge to help sustain this: the goodwill and generosity of thousands of Americans participating personally, either by going out of their way to donate blood while in Israel or by joining and partnering with Heart to Heart to provide the extra resources Israel needs to maintain its blood supply as one that's always safe and abundant.

It may not be God Himself filling the blood bank as He fills the aquifers, but Israel's blood supply is reliant on people with a heart for Israel who understand Israel is biblically

ordained. To save a life in Israel carries with it an extra level of responsibility.

Like my own personal prayer for rain and being sure not to waste water, the issue of Israel's blood supply is very personal. I donate blood as often as possible, have instilled that value in my children and am privileged to have brought thousands of Americans to donate blood here as well. I pray that Heart to Heart will see participation grow from tens to hundreds of thousands, and then millions, because maintaining our blood supply requires personal action and cannot be done on prayer alone.

When you come to Israel, please look me up. I'll be happy to have a conversation with you about all this and more—over a glass of a famous Israeli cabernet, dipping fresh bread in some of Israel's most flavorful olive oil and making an outing to donate blood. Perhaps not all on the same day, however.

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