



# Weekly Clergy Message

**Shining a Light on Israel**  
**Hazzan Eliot Vogel**  
**Parasha B'ha'alot'kha**  
**May 30, 2018**

One can see from the Torah's very careful description in this week's *parasha*, *B'ha'alot'kha* that the *menorah* has a significance beyond that of any other of the Tabernacle's furnishings. A *midrashic* comment illustrates: "As I shined a light on Israel, making them conspicuous among the nations, let them shine a light on Me." (Num. R. 15:5) Just as the light of the *menorah* indicates God's election of Israel; the people of Israel, by living in accordance with the values of Torah, will represent God's presence in the world. Thus Israel will be "*Or Lagoyim*," a "Light unto the Nations." In *Emet Ve-Emunah*, a statement of values of Conservative Judaism (quoted in the Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary), we read "...the covenant of Israel offers a purpose for Jewish existence....It obligates us to build a just and compassionate society throughout the world and especially in the land of Israel..."

Since the founding of the State of Israel 70 years ago, the phrase "shining a light on Israel" has taken on connotations which had been unimaginable for 1900 years. The actions of Israel, the nation-state and *not* the people, could be examined, scrutinized and critiqued just like those of any other country.

Many a modern Jew (both living within and outside of Israel) sees the brilliant accomplishments of the State of Israel along with the ongoing struggles it has faced with its neighbors within the context of the Biblical concept of "*Or LaGoyim*" (*a light unto the nations*). Certainly this has been true in recent weeks as tensions in Gaza have risen again, and as the relocation of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem has drawn criticism from many corners. Jews who passionately love Israel are appalled when groups such as Hamas expend the lives of their own people in order to threaten the safety and security of Israel's citizens. These same Jews, nonetheless, pray that those who act in the name of the defense of the nation-state of Israel will do so as humanely and compassionately as possible.

For the committed Jew in the modern age, "shining light upon Israel" potentially has pitfalls. No modern nation is perfect. In this piece, entitled "[13 Inconvenient Truths About What Has Been Happening in Gaza](#)," *Tablet Magazine's* Yair Rosenblum brings to light (in what I find to be a very balanced manner) a very sad, messy and emotionally wrenching subject. I hope you find it worthwhile reading.