

Ben-Gurion's Favorite Biblical Verses

By Rabbi Bernard S. Raskas

October 16 marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of David Ben-Gurion, one of the greatest Jews of modern times. His contributions to the Jewish people and his impact on the world scene are destined to be remembered for as long as the human race will endure. Most of us are aware of his life and it is hardly possible to do justice to such a towering figure in a brief article. Instead, it would be more interesting to take his five favorite biblical verses and use them as some revealing insights into his life.

The first verse is from Isaiah (45:7): "I, the Lord, do all these things."

As much as Ben-Gurion disregarded ritual, he was a deeply religious man. He believed in God but felt that ritual was not necessary because living in the land of Israel provided the cement to keep the Jewish people together in modern times. Let me quote his own words: "The essence of being a Jew, in my opinion, is the idea of the Prophets -- not the Torah, but the Prophets. They have two ideas: You must love one single God and you must lead a normal life. That is all that matters."

He had tremendous respect for the natural forces of the universe. He spent his time cultivating roses in the Negev, walking the terrain of Israel, and encouraging people literally to work in the soil. One of the loveliest pictures I have ever seen shows him feeding a bottle to a newborn lamb. It is absolutely beautiful, and it really shows his love and reverence for the life of the universe.

The second verse is taken from Leviticus 19:18 and 33: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself ... When an alien settles with you in your land ... you shall love him as yourself."

It is very interesting that although Ben-Gurion

was a very strong figure he never used other than democratic means to press for his policies. He was elected Premier of Israel and never once did he silence his opposition even though it was bitter and even though he had the power to do so.

Although the Arabs were his adversaries, he never spoke disrespectfully of them or their cultures.

It is rather remarkable that even though he was devoted to the Jewish people to an unbelievable degree and worked so hard on their behalf, he found time to study other cultures. Consider the fact that he was a keen student of the Greek and Eastern philosophies and used to stand on his head in a yoga exercise. In addition to his profound knowledge of the Bible, he mastered English, Russian, Greek, Yiddish, Turkish, French, Arabic, and at the time of his death he was studying Spanish. What an extraordinary human being!

The third biblical verse that he loved was Isaiah 42:6: "I, the Lord, have called you with righteous purpose ... I have formed you and appointed you to be a covenant to all peoples, a beacon for the nations."

Ben-Gurion's dedication to the Jewish people was absolute. It was he who proclaimed the State of Israel after two thousand years of exile. It was he who built up the armed might of Israel, and one of the symbols of this is the fact that he changed his last name from Green to Ben-Gurion, which means "the son of a lion." It was he who brought Eichmann to trial to prove, and I quote: "Jews are not sheep to be slaughtered,

but a people who can hit back."

But even more than this, he showed himself to be an essential Jew by his love of the Bible and his constant study of the Prophets. Ben-Gurion used to teach the Bible. Throughout his life he focused all his attention on the Prophets until he became a prophet himself. He was his people's revolutionary and the visionary that gave birth to their new homeland. Interestingly enough, the New York Times in an editorial lauded Ben-Gurion, above all else, for his love of biblical scholarship. And so he was committed to the concept of leading an exemplary, righteous, and just life. And because he felt the Jew had a special destiny not only in the active world but in the world of learning, he is properly designated the representative Jew of modern times.

The fourth passage from the Bible is taken from the Book of Micah (2:3): "...nation shall not lift up sword against nation ..." He used to say, "I consider peace more important than territories." He truly loved all men.

The greatest paradox of Ben-Gurion is that even though he had to fight all his life he essentially had the goal of peace. He became a friend of the great political figures of the world and always and forever he pressed them for a peaceful solution to Israel's problems. His love of peace was shown when Israel had its 25th anniversary parade. Because of the political

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