



Sermon Tidbits

OCTOBER 13, 2008

Chol Hamoed, Shemini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

Good Tidings, From Start to Finish (Shabbat Chol Hamoed)

Et le'ehov v'et lisno – “A time to love and a time to hate...” (Ecclesiastes 3:8)

When we examine the entire contents of the famous verse, “A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace,” the examples seem out of order. In the first half of the verse, love comes before hatred, good before bad. In the second half of the verse we see the reverse order, war precedes peace, bad before good. Why the discrepancy between two halves of a single verse? Rabbi Joseph Chaim ben Elijah al-Chakam, author of the Ben Ish Chai, notes in his responsa (Torah Lishmah 445) that this entire section represents an effort to “begin with good tidings, and end with good tidings.” The section begins with “A time to be born,” (verse 2), and so it ends with “a time for peace”. Yet, this verse also relates an important truth about war and peace. While an individual and a nation must always extend herself first and foremost for good – “a time to love,” if that benevolence is spurned and met with violence then it must replace that goodwill with determination – “a time for war.” Thus, only when the Children of Israel had pacified their adversaries could they reap the benefits and prosperity that accompany “a time for peace.”

Modern-day Israel and the United States have shared King Solomon’s vision in their relationships with other nations. Both nations have consistently expressed a desire for peace and success both in the Middle East and around the world, and Israel continues to make painful sacrifices in her pursuit of tranquility. Yet, Islamic fundamentalists groups from Al Qaeda to Hezbollah to Hamas have sought to attack the very nations that have extended themselves in peace.

Those groups that have declared jihad on Israel and the United States, determined to destroy democracy and replace it with Islamic military rule, force these governments to protect their citizens. Yet, both Israel and the United States realize that this conflict will not be eternal. Both yearn for Solomon’s final era – “A time for peace,” when the world, secure in the rights of all individuals to live in freedom and safety, can find common ground with those who once sought to destroy freedom. Today, Israel continues to seek peace with its adversaries and has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to resolving the conflict with both the Palestinians and its Arab neighbors by releasing prisoners, removing checkpoints and roadblocks, and considering potential plans to vacate portions of the West Bank. Israel finds itself in the midst of a difficult region, yet she remains focused on her goal: “a time for peace,” when her adversaries finally recognize that their interest lay not in the murder of innocent civilians but in the economic development of the region, including a peaceful coexistence with a safe and secure Israel.

At that time, Solomon’s vision will be realized and we will be able to celebrate that not only was the creation of the State of Israel a “beginning with good tidings,” but that we merited seeing “an end of good tidings” as well. ■

International Imbalance (Shemini Atzeret)

U’bayom hashemini atzeret tihiyeh – “On the eighth day you shall have an assembly...” (Numbers 29:35)

The Torah relates that the priests offered seventy separate sacrifices to God over the seven days of Sukkot. These seventy sacrifices correspond to the seventy nations that represent the population of the world, emphasizing God’s love not only for the Jewish people, but for all nations of the world. Why then do we celebrate an eighth day of

Shemini Atzeret? Midrash Tanchuma (16) answers this question by noting a glaring imbalance in the relationship between the Jewish people and the nations of the world. “What is the meaning of the verse (Psalms 109:4), ‘In return for my love they are my adversaries’? Said Israel to the Holy One: Master of the World! We offer seventy offerings for the seventy nations. Therefore, they should love us. But, it is not sufficient that they do not love us, but instead they hate us, as it is written, “In return for my love they are my adversaries.” For this reason God gives us one extra day upon which we offer a lone additional sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish people.

Today Israel continues to experience this imbalance with other peoples, especially in its relationship with Hamas. Despite the fact that the Hamas charter continues to call for Israel’s destruction and Hamas’ failure to return IDF captive Corporal Gilad Schalit (held now for over 850 days), Israel has increased the amount of goods entering Gaza in compliance with the *tahadiyah*, the Egyptian mediated effort to reduce hostilities in and around Gaza.

Since agreeing to the *tahadiyah* commodities in Gaza have increased by 15% and the fuel supply in Gaza has risen from 2.2 million liters to 2.9 million liters, the Israeli newspaper Yediot Achronot reported. Yet in response to these Israeli efforts to maintain calm and provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza, Hamas continues to promote violence. According to a report in Ha’aretz, Hamas is broadcasting detailed terrorism training classes on Gaza television. Hamas, the Iranian-backed terrorist group, is using the airwaves to teach Palestinians fighting techniques including shooting at moving targets, assaulting tanks and building improvised bombs. Israeli officials said have they are prepared for military action, and are fully aware that, as Hamas leaders have said in the past, a *tahadiyah* often serves as a mere “tactic” in their war against Israel.

Until Hamas accepts Israel’s right to exist, renounces terrorism and agrees to abide by all previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements it must continue to face international isolation. And, just as King David, we will continue to sigh as we say, “In return for my love they are my adversaries.” ■

Strength and Tranquility (Simchat Torah)

Vayar’eihu...et kol ha’aretz – “And he showed him all the land...” (Deuteronomy 34:1)

Immediately preceding his death, Moses climbs Mount Nevo to behold the Promised Land with his own eyes. Upon reaching the summit of the mountain God, “showed him all the Land.” Rashi comments that Moses’ miraculous vision extended both physically and temporally, allowing him to see not only the entire Land of Israel, but also its future as well. Yet, Rashi notes that God showed him the entire land, “During [its time of] peace, and the future attackers who would besiege it.” (see Rashi on 34:1 and subsequent comments of Rashi). In each particular area that Moses views, Rashi teaches us that he also saw that location during its future tranquility, its destruction, and the battles the Jewish nation would fight over that land.

Rashi reminds us of a critical truth about the Jewish homeland: while we pine for periods of peace and tranquility, Moses understood that the safety and security of the Land of Israel would never be free. Rather, the Jewish people would continually be forced to struggle to protect their right to the land.

Moses saw the future of the Land of Israel until the end of days - including this past year, 5768. He saw a year blessed with safety and security thanks to the hard work of the thousands of people who toil to protect Israel. Moses saw the determination of peace seeking people the world over, from the soldiers of the IDF to the citizens of the United States who continue to work hard, building relationships with their Members of Congress, to ensure that the State of Israel has the ability and the international stature to defend itself. But Moses also witnessed a year of destruction: the deaths of eight innocent yeshiva students at the hands of a single terrorist and the running down of shoppers on the streets of Jerusalem with bulldozers intended to build a city, not to kill innocent people.

As we conclude the Torah with the words “Chazak, Chazak, v’nitchazek!” – “We are strong, we are strong, and we will be strong!” we pray for the continued strength to act on behalf of a strong Jewish people and a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, so that the coming year brings not continued struggle, but rather visions of Israel, “In her tranquility.” ■

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