



Sermon Tidbits

OCTOBER 5, 2009

Shemini Atzeret - Simchat Torah

The Most Pressing Need

Bayom hashemini atzeret tihiyeh lachem - "On the eighth day you shall have an assembly" (Numbers 29:35)

According to tradition Shemini Atzeret is not considered to be a continuation of Sukkot, but rather a unique and separate holiday. Without a stated purpose, what is the underlying nature of Shemini Atzeret? The Midrash (Pesikta Derav Kahana 195a) explains that Shemini Atzeret presents a unique opportunity for the Jewish people to address urgent needs for the immediate future. "*Lama ne'etzru?* [from the word *atzeret*] "Why did they remain another day? This can be compared to a king whose servants and family members came on a holiday to honor him. The queen kept hinting to them that they should request their needs from the king. When they failed to 'get' her hints, she held them over for an additional day so that they could claim their needs from the king. So too, the Torah hints that the Jewish people should claim their needs...over Sukkot. Since we do not focus on our own needs [during Sukkot], we are 'held back' an extra day."

As we begin 5770 the Jewish people surely have no more pressing need than guaranteeing Israel's survival, and we should utilize this Shemini Atzeret to rededicate ourselves to this goal. With Iran rapidly advancing towards a nuclear capability, we should all focus our energies on protecting our brothers and sisters in Israel by working to halt the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

President Obama and the leaders of Britain and France recently revealed a secret Iranian underground nuclear plant which was hidden for years from international weapons inspectors. According to American officials the plant was designed to hold about 3,000 centrifuges, not enough for any peaceful purpose, but enough to manufacture about one bomb's worth of nuclear material per year. A recently leaked confidential United Nations report concluded that Tehran already has the ability to make enough fuel for a nuclear bomb and has worked on developing a missile system that can carry an atomic warhead. The Financial Times additionally reports that, "Britain's intelligence services say that Iran has been secretly designing a nuclear warhead 'since late 2004 or early 2005,' an assessment that suggests Tehran has embarked on the final steps towards acquiring nuclear weapons capability."

Should talks between the United States and Iran fail to produce tangible results, the United States should impose sweeping economic sanctions aimed at curbing Iran's frightening rush towards nuclear military power, including the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act and the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act. For more on this legislation, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

Traditionally, on Shemini Atzeret the Jewish people focus on urgent needs for the future. This year, the stakes could not be higher. We must devote our energy to curbing the threat of a nuclear Iran today; next year could be too late. ■

Ignoring the Facts

Bereshit bara Elohim - "In the beginning God created..."(Genesis 1:1)

On the morning of Simchat Torah, immediately following the conclusion of the Torah reading, we open a second Torah scroll and begin reading from the book of Genesis. Why do we follow the conclusion of one Torah cycle with

the beginning of another? The anonymous author of the Kabalistic Hemdat Yamim quotes an unidentified Midrash about a celestial accusation against the Jewish people. “When Israel concludes the [reading of the] Torah, the accusing angel appears before God and claims: ‘They study the Torah, but they never finish it!’ God answers, ‘They just finished it.’ The angel replies, ‘Although they did finish it, they won’t begin again.’ Thus, when the people begin reading Genesis yet again, the angel can no longer accuse the Jewish people.”

In the same way that the angel quoted by Hemdat Yamim makes claims about the Jewish people without knowing the facts, the United Nations (U.N.) recently released a biased, critical report without considering all of the evidence.

Thirty-two Senators – 16 Democrats and 16 Republicans – recently sent a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calling on the Obama administration to prevent the Goldstone Commission’s report to the U.N. Human Rights Council from reaching the U.N. Security Council for punitive measures. The letter, which was spearheaded by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Johnny Isakson (R-GA), states that, “The loss of innocent lives is unfortunate wherever it occurs – in Israel or in Gaza. But this biased report ignores many of the key facts, and this should be recognized by the international community.” The Goldstone Commission was given a biased mandate, to prove that Israel was guilty of war crimes during Operation Cast Lead, and their report focused exclusively on Israel’s activities during the defensive operation while completely ignoring the eight years of Hamas rocket and mortar attacks that preceded it. The Obama administration, which should be commended for helping to ensure that the U.N. has postponed any action on the report for six months, should continue to make sure that the report never comes before the U.N. Security Council or any other U.N. body. For more on the Goldstone Commission’s report, click [here](#).

Like the accusing angel who makes claims before checking the facts, the Goldstone Commission arrived at its conclusion without all the data. We in the pro-Israel community must now contact our Congressmen and thank them for standing against the Commission’s report, and urge them to make sure that no further harm emanates from it. ■

The Wise Path

Hachacham einav b’rosho -- "The wise man, his eyes are in his head" (Ecclesiastes 2:14)

This unusual bit of wisdom, shared by King Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, prompts the question: whose eyes are not in their head? A Talmudic passage (Tamid 32) helps provide the answer. “Alexander the Great once asked the elders of the Negev: ‘Who is wise?’ They replied, ‘He who sees the outcome of his actions.’” Thus, King Solomon was really stating that a wise person has his or her eyes *b’rosho* – open at the beginning of their actions. The wise person understands that their actions today carry consequences for tomorrow. Conversely, the fool not only acts without regard for the outcome of his or her behavior, but they walk in the dark, indifferent to that danger.

Israeli researchers are heeding King Solomon’s wisdom, that one should understand the future consequences of current actions, and developing projects to keep the world safe from future flu outbreaks like the H1N1 pandemic which is sweeping the world today.

As the H1N1 virus, more commonly known as the swine flu, continues to spread across the globe, Israeli researchers are working to curb its effects while developing new methods to prevent future outbreaks. One such Israeli company, NanoPass technologies, has already developed a new needle which could provide H1N1 vaccinations to up to three times the number of people. In addition, “an Israeli company has begun clinical trials of a universal flu vaccine that could protect against almost every type of flu virus,” the website Israel21c.org reports. Israeli scientists are also working on a chip technology that would identify sick animals, and may help prevent future outbreaks of illnesses like the H1N1 virus, and heat sensors that can identify people suffering from fever, even in a crowd, which could be used to isolate and quarantine potential virus carriers.

King Solomon stated that the wise person is someone who understands the consequences of his or her actions. Israeli scientists are indeed proving to be wise, utilizing new technologies to ensure that we develop technologies today to prevent the illnesses of tomorrow. ■

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