

SEPTEMBER 29, 2009

## Sukkot

### A Normal Night

#### **Ba'sukkot teishvu - "And you shall dwell in booths" (Leviticus 23:42)**

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The rabbi of Berlin, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Levin, once invited a local government official to join him for the Passover Seder. Sitting at the beautifully decorated table, the official listened to a young child ask *mah nishtanah*, "Why is this night different?" "I wonder," the official asked, "why today, when you sit comfortably at such a festive table with such expensive finery, does the child ask 'why is this night different?' After all, he should ask the question on the holiday of Sukkot, when you leave your homes and dwell in a miserable *sukkah*?" The rabbi explained. "The Jew is accustomed to numerous difficulties. The enemies of the Jewish people throughout all time have consistently risen up to destroy us, and many times evicted Jews from their homes. For this reason, when on Sukkot we sit in our temporary homes, the child does not wonder at all, for this seems normal. But when we sit beside a fancy table in comfort, immediately the child wonders, 'what's different?'"

Just as the young child feels normal sitting in the unprotected *sukkah*, Israelis sitting in their *sukkot* this year also feel normal, as the threat of a nuclear Iran forces them to constantly feel exposed and vulnerable.

During the same week in which Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad repeated his claims that "Israel has no future" and that the Holocaust was "a lie," President Obama along with French President Nicholas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced that Iran has constructed a secret uranium enrichment facility during the course of the past several years. The facility has no commercial use and has been built to house 3,000 centrifuges, which is not enough to produce low enriched uranium to run nuclear power plants, but is enough to produce highly enriched uranium for about two bombs a year. The disclosure undermines Iran's assertions that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes and that it had fully disclosed all aspects of its program. As the president said, "the size and configuration of this facility is inconsistent with a peaceful program."

As part of the United States' efforts to halt the Iranian nuclear program the administration has announced that the P5+1 – the United States, France, Britain, Russia, China and Germany – will begin negotiations with Iran on October 1<sup>st</sup>. For this process to be effective it is crucial that these talks not be open-ended and that they are also backed by the threat of crippling international sanctions like those included in the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act and the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act. For more on this legislation, visit [www.aipac.org/TakeAction](http://www.aipac.org/TakeAction).

With the Iranian leadership continuing their attempts to develop a nuclear weapons capability, Israelis have good reason to feel exposed. Sadly, this Sukkot, as Israelis sit under the stars they will continue to consider their threatened existence normal. ■

### Lost Opportunity

#### **V'hikravtem olah -- "And you shall present a burnt offering" (Numbers 29:13)**

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A count of all the burnt offering sacrifices that were brought in the Temple during Sukkot, beginning with 13 on the first day, 12 on the second day, etc., yields a total of 70 special sacrifices that were offered over the course of the

holiday. Why were the people commanded to bring 70 offerings on Sukkot? The Talmud (Sukkah 55b) explains that these sacrifices corresponded to the 70 nations, as a means of atonement for the entire world and to ensure a bountiful rainfall for the coming year. The Talmud mournfully notes the irony that with the destruction of the Temple, the nations of the world lost a source of atonement for which they have no replacement.

Like the lost opportunity of the 70 sacrifices of Sukkot, the U.N. is missing the potential of its Human Rights Council. By singularly devoting its attention towards unfair criticism of Israel, the council is proving itself a biased group.

Recently, the United Nations Human Rights Council released the Goldstone Commission's report, a highly controversial document which accuses Israel of committing war crimes during Operation Cast Lead. Due to very real bias in the report, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice rejected the council's proposal to compel Israel to conduct an investigation into alleged war crimes during the defensive operation, The Washington Post reported. According to Rice, the United States has long had "very serious concerns" about the mandate which the Human Rights Council gave to its investigators, calling it "unbalanced, one-sided and basically unacceptable." The Goldstone Commission's Report is the latest in a long series of biased, one-sided actions taken by the Human Rights Council. To date the council has passed 26 anti-Israel resolutions, out of a total 33 motions to censure countries since the council's inception in June 2006. For more on the Goldstone Commission's Report, click [here](#).

The U.N. Human Rights Council should and could be a force for world peace and unity. Sadly, like the Sukkot sacrifices, the council has become a lost opportunity for the nations of the world. ■

## Abraham: Timeless Symbol of Unity

### Azamen l'seudati ushpizin ila'in - "I invite to my meal the exalted guests..."(Sukkot liturgy)

There is a common custom of welcoming the *Ushpizin* into the *sukkah* throughout the holiday. This mystical custom emanates from a quote in the Zohar which states, "Israel, who leave their homes and enter into the *sukkah*...merit to receive the face of the *Shechinah*, and all of the seven faithful shepherds descend from the Garden of Eden and visit the *sukkah*, and thereby become *ushpizin* (guests)." The seven guests that we invite into our *sukkot* on succeeding days of the holiday are: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov (Book of Our Heritage, p. 83) notes that in referring to these leaders as shepherds, the Zohar emphasizes the qualities that each one specifically brought to the world. Abraham, for example, demonstrated tremendous kindness, for which he was given the name *Avraham*, a shortened version of *av hamon goyim*, father of many nations. On Sukkot, we celebrate this magnificent kindness that he taught to the entire world.

Abraham's kindness, which unified nations, compels us to welcome him as our guest on Sukkot. Following this example, an Israeli has created a new apolitical interfaith association to unite people of different religions.

Yehuda Stolov, an orthodox Jew from Jerusalem, noticed that at many interfaith meetings the talk always centered on politics, a divisive and inflammatory issue in the Middle East. Realizing that people of different faiths share common religious traditions, he formed the Interfaith Encounter Association. The organization focuses on creating safe and productive meetings aimed at a sense of shared identity and understanding between people of different faiths, the website Israel21c.org reported. "Interfaith dialogue can be a powerful tool of peace-building and an attractive [venue] for people to join," Stolov said. Bringing together Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze, group leaders generate discussions about common themes including food, the environment, and religious traditions. The group focuses on topics of commonality, including the importance of Abraham to each religion, noting his prominence in the New Testament, and his role as a forefather to both Muslims and Jews.

Even thousands of years after his death Abraham continues to serve as a bridge between nations and as a model for kindness between Jews and Arabs. As we celebrate Sukkot, there could be no more appropriate guest to welcome. ■