

SEPTEMBER 20, 2010

Sukkot and Shabbat Chol Hamoed

The International Holiday (for Sukkot)

Thirteen young bulls... (Numbers 29:13)

פְּרִים בְּנֵי בָקָר שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר (בַּמִּדְבָּר כֹּט:יג)

More than any other holiday, Sukkot takes on an international flavor as the Jewish people focus on the well-being of the entire world. The Talmud (Sukkah 55b) notes that the nation was commanded to offer 70 special sacrifices in the Temple during this time as a prayer for the 70 nations of the world. Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem in the early 20th century, found another reference to the 70 nations in the four species taken over Sukkot. The numerical values of the last letter of each of the four species also equal 70: lulay – bet (2) + etrog – gimmel (3) + hadas – samech (60) + aravah – heh (5).

The international focus during Sukkot reminds us that our tradition concerns itself with the welfare of the entire world. Yet, while we concentrate on enriching the world, the international community is concerned with stopping Iran's nuclear weapons program.

While Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has correctly stated that Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons would constitute an existential threat to the Jewish state, it would also have devastating consequences for U.S. and international interests in the Middle East as well. A nuclear-armed Iran would likely lead to nuclear proliferation elsewhere around the globe, while fundamentally altering the strategic balance of the Middle East. Nuclear weapons would embolden Iran's brutal theocratic dictatorship, giving it confidence to further intensify its support for terrorist allies like Hamas and Hizballah, which actively work to undermine stability and peace efforts. Combined with Iran's improving ballistic missile capability, Iranian nuclear weapons would also pose a direct threat to nations across Europe and the Middle East. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

This Sukkot, let us pray for the well-being and prosperity of the entire world. In this spirit, we cannot forget that Iran's nuclear ambitions pose a grave threat to both U.S. interests and international stability. ■

A Time for Peace (for Shabbat Chol Hamoed)

A time for war, a time for peace (Ecclesiasties 3:8)

עַת מַלְחָמָה וְעַת שְׁלוֹם (קְהֵלֶת ג:ח)

In a beautiful essay, which opens his commentary to Parashat Shoftim, Rabbeinu Bachya (on Deuteronomy 16:18) describes how peace forms a central theme throughout Judaism. In many synagogues, as we return the Torah to the ark, we sing the words of Solomon who wrote that the ways of the Torah, “are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace” (Proverbs 3:17). Moreover, Rabbeinu Bachya states that the heavens (*shamayim*) were created by merging fire (*aish*) and water (*mayim*), which could only be achieved through peace. Finally, he notes that Solomon concluded the “times” section (3:1-8) of Ecclesiasties with the theme of peace, pointing out that “even during times of war, we need peace,” as the Torah commands the Jewish army to always sue for peace before engaging in battle (see Deuteronomy 20:10).

Following the Jewish ethic, which values peace as a venerable goal, the state of Israel has taken bold steps to advance the peace process with the Palestinian Authority (PA), and remains committed to it despite recent terrorist attacks from Hamas.

As peace talks shifted from Egypt to Jerusalem, the Iranian-backed terrorist group Hamas fired at least 12 rockets into Israel, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The attacks came one day after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PA President Mahmoud Abbas completed a second round of direct negotiations. Hamas has adamantly opposed any peace talks between the PA and Israel and has threatened to unleash a wave of violence against Israeli civilians in an effort to impede the direct negotiations. In addition to the rockets, Hamas fighters fired on Israeli forces operating near the Gaza-Israel border. The terrorist group also took credit for the recent shooting and killing of four Israelis, including a pregnant woman, while Abbas and Netanyahu were meeting in Washington, D.C. Despite these brutal attacks, Israel remains firmly committed to continuing direct negotiations. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

King Solomon noted the juxtaposition of times of war and peace. Nowadays, those periods are entwined as we live in an era where peace talks and terrorist attacks can occur in the same day. Yet, Israel's commitment to peace reflects the Jewish state's understanding of Rabbeinu Bachya's message: "even during times of war, we need peace." ■

Support through Action (for Shabbat Chol Hamoed)

I will also do this thing you have said (Exodus 33:17)
(לג:יז)

גם את הדבר הזה אשר דברת אעשה (שמות

According to the Torah, Moses was not satisfied even after God had granted forgiveness to the people for the sin of the Golden Calf. "How will I know that I have found favor in Your eyes, I and Your people?" (33:16), Moses asked. To assure him, God promised to "do this thing." What specifically did God promise to do to reassure the nation? Ramban suggests that God promised a sign that would be set in stone. God understood that in order to reestablish the covenant with the Jewish nation following the sin of the Golden Calf, words and promises would not suffice—a tangible sign of that bond was necessary. For this reason, God commanded Moses to hew new tablets to assure the nation that the Divine presence would remain with them.

Following the sin of the Golden Calf, God recognized that the Israelites needed reassurance and took action to support the nation. As the Palestinian Authority (PA) looks to continue direct negotiations with Israel, it needs similar strong support from the Arab world.

The PA recently expressed hope that the Arab countries will finally keep their promises to help the PA financially, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. Most of the Arab countries have failed to meet their pledges to provide the Palestinians with financial aid. According to figures released by the PA, only 22 percent of the \$530 million received since the beginning of this year arrived from Arab donors. The rest came from Western countries and organizations, led by the United States. With the exception of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the Arab world has continued to ignore the Palestinians' repeated requests for help—and when money has been transferred, it has been a small fraction of past aid. In 2009, Saudi Arabia gave the PA \$240 million; Riyadh has only given \$30 million in 2010.

The commandment to replace the original tablets underscores the importance of taking action to demonstrate reassurance and support. The Arab states must take this message to heart, and support the Palestinian Authority not only with declarations, but by following through on their pledges. ■

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