

OCTOBER 10, 2011

Sukkot & Shabbat Chol Ha'moed

The Taste of the Tree

The fruit of a beautiful tree (Leviticus 23:40)

פרי עץ הדר (ויקרא כג:מ)

While the four species used over the holiday of Sukkot are commonly identified as the *lulav*, *etrog*, *hadas* and *aravah*, the Torah never actually lists them as such, instead providing details about them and leaving the rabbis in the Talmud to derive their exact identities. For example, rather than calling for us to take an *etrog*, the verse commands us to take the “fruit of *etz hadar* (beautiful trees).” How did the rabbis know that this meant the *etrog*? The Talmud (Sukkah 35a) explains that because the verse describes the fruit as coming from a “beautiful tree,” this must refer to “a tree whose wood and fruit are equal [in taste],” a description which applies to the *etrog* tree. According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (see his commentary to the Torah on 23:40), “the ethereal material which gives the aroma to the fruit exists already in the wood and leaves of the tree, and give them the taste of the fruit.”

The sages identified the “beautiful tree” as the species whose wood contained the flavorful qualities of its fruit. Today, understanding that a tree’s essence can be powerful, an Israeli company is extracting sugars from American surplus wood and bringing desperately needed green jobs to the United States.

Improving on a decades-old process of making biofuel from wood chips, the father-son team of 93-year-old chemist Professor Avraham Baniel and businessman Eran Baniel founded HCL Clean in 2007 to market a new process they developed to turn the cellulose fibers in wood into a sugar with numerous industrial uses. According to the website [Israel21c](#), HCL Clean Tech recently received a \$100 million bond package from the Mississippi state legislature to build plants that will take wood chips from the region, where there is a surplus of pine trees, and process them for products in the cosmetics, pet food, and lubricants industries. HCL will open several plants across Mississippi over the next 10 years. The project, which will utilize wood that is normally wasted, is expected to create about 800 new jobs in an environmentally-friendly process.

The fact that the wood of the *etrog* tree contained the essence of its fruit led the rabbis to identify the “fruit of *etz hadar*.” Recognizing the potential power in the wood of the tree, an Israeli company has not simply discovered a great way of using surplus wood, they have also helped pave the way to employment for hundred of Americans. ■

Building a Lasting Peace

You shall dwell in booths for seven days (Leviticus 23:42)

בסכות תשבו שבעת ימים (ויקרא כג:מב)

At first glance, construction of a *sukkah* seems easy: above three walls one must place a roof made of material that grew in the ground—*schach*—and you have a kosher *sukkah*. However, it is not this simple. In fact, traditional Jewish law mandates a specific order when constructing a *sukkah*. If one places the *schach* over four pillars, and then adds the walls to the structure afterwards, that *sukkah* is not kosher for holiday use. The walls must be constructed before the *schach*. The Talmud (Sukkah 11a) explains that “you must make” the *sukkah*, and it cannot be constructed “from that which is already made.” From this unusual law we learn that not only is the final structure important, but the process of building the *sukkah* is critical as well.

According to the Talmud, placement of the roof—the final step in the *sukkah*—without walls in place represents an attempt to circumvent the necessary steps to construct a true, proper *sukkah*. Similarly, The Palestinian Authority’s (PA) attempts to establish a Palestinian state without negotiating directly with Israel is an attempt to circumvent the necessary steps to construct a true and lasting peace.

Following the PA’s recent application for statehood at the United Nations, senior U.S. officials downplayed the effectiveness of the unilateral effort to establish an internationally recognized state. [Agence France-Presse](#) reported that in an interview with Egypt’s Al-Hayat TV, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, “No matter what happens or doesn’t happen in the United Nations, unless we can get the Palestinians and the Israelis to negotiate over the boundaries of the state, the security provisions, what happens in Jerusalem, what happens with refugees, water, all of the issues we know so well have to be resolved, we’re going to raise expectations without being able to deliver. We want to see both sides back at the table.” Asked about the Palestinians’ quest for full recognition at the U.N., the top U.S. diplomat appeared to try to downplay the importance of the ongoing effort, which Washington opposes and has promised to veto. She said the U.S. concern was not what happened or did not happen there—but the need for negotiations to resume for real progress to be made. For the latest on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, click [here](#).

Like the building of the *sukkah*, meaningful endeavors must follow a specific, logical process in order to create lasting results. In their hopes of establishing a viable state, the Palestinians must also follow the proper process of negotiating a mutually agreeable settlement with Israel, or the structure will surely fall. ■

Answering for Our Actions (Shabbat Chol Ha’moed)

And they were forgotten in the city (Ecclesiastes 8:10)

וישתכחו בעיר (קהלת ח:י)

In one of his many complaints against injustice in the world, Kohelet lodges a seemingly vague indictment against an evil despot. “And so I saw the wicked buried, and they entered into their rest; but they that had done right went away from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city; this also is vanity.” What is the meaning of this cryptic verse? Rashi (on 8:10), quoting the Talmud (Gittin 66b), explains that Kohelet’s complaint refers to a tyrant who “deserved to be buried in the dust, and was denigrated in the eyes of the nations...for he desecrated the Temple of God...but was praised in his city for the actions he committed against the house of God.” Yet, in the end, this ruler would be forgotten by history and “his name will be erased from the city upon which he perpetrated his evil.”

History records numerous oppressive leaders—similar to the evil ruler lamented in the book of Kohelet—who are ultimately called upon to account for their actions. Hopefully, the United Nations will soon add Syrian President Bashar al Assad to the list of those who have had to answer for crimes committed against the innocent.

In the six months of largely peaceful anti-regime protests, the Assad dictatorship in Syria, a U.S.-designated state sponsor of terror, has cracked down on the protesters fiercely, killing more than 2,700 and detaining many thousands more, including [over 3,000](#) in a recent three-day period. On the last weekend in September alone, eleven people were shot dead by security forces in a village in Hama province, while another eight died in military assaults on the flashpoint city of Homs. After U.N. efforts to pass a resolution condemning Syria recently collapsed when Russia and China vetoed a measure that contained a weak reference to the possibility of sanctions against Damascus, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice described the United States as “outraged” by the failure of the Council to pass the resolution, [The New York Times](#) reported. “During this season of change, the people of the Middle East can now see clearly which nations have chosen to ignore their calls for democracy and instead prop up desperate, cruel dictators,” she said. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

The Syrian regime has perpetrated acts of heinous violence and aggression against its own citizens. Like the despot that Kohelet lamented, may Assad come to answer for his crimes—crimes that the world can see and he must stop. ■

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