



Sermon Tidbits

SEPTEMBER 30, 2012

Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot

An Island of Peace - Sukkot

That your generations may know (Leviticus 23:43)

למען ידעו דורותיכם (ויקרא כג:מג)

As Jews, we are commanded to sit in the *sukkah* during the seven days of Sukkot so “that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths” (23:43). Eliezer argues (Sukkah 11b) that the reference to the booths is an allusion to the Clouds of Glory that accompanied the nation as it traveled in the desert. What did these clouds do? According to the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 1,2), the clouds protected the people from the brutal heat and sun, they killed dangerous animals such as snakes and scorpions, the clouds removed dangerous stones from the Israelites’ path, and even straightened and flattened the road that lay ahead. Thus, according to Rabbi Eliezer, we sit in the *sukkah* to remember that although the nation found itself in a potentially dangerous and volatile locale, the people nonetheless enjoyed miraculous peace as they traveled in the desert.

Like the Children of Israel who enjoyed tranquility despite traveling through the harsh environment of the desert, the state of Israel also represents a bastion of peace, freedom and calmness in the center of a volatile neighborhood.

Since the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, the world has grappled with a Middle East in turmoil. Following a civil war in Libya and the ouster of Libyan President Khadaffi, this country has struggled with violence that has stemmed from radical Islamic groups. In Lebanon, the [Associated Press](#) recently reported that Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of the terrorist Hizballah group, exhorted hundreds of thousands of supporters to keep up the campaign (ostensibly against an anti-Islam video) that unleashed deadly violence and anger at the United States across the Muslim world. In Egypt, an obscure militant group based in the North Sinai region claimed responsibility for a cross-border attack that killed an Israeli soldier, calling attention to the uphill struggle the newly formed Egyptian government is facing to control the restive Sinai region, [The New York Times](#) reported. Meanwhile, as the civil war in Syria continues to rage, the brutal regime of Bashar Al Assad is focusing much of its military might on civilian attacks. In the center of this upheaval, Israel is a unique sanctuary of liberty and pluralism in the unstable Middle East. As the only stable democracy in the region, Israel represents peace and freedom and upholds the progressive values it shares with America. For more on the Middle East and the countries that surround Israel, click [here](#).

While in the *sukkah*, we remember the peace and tranquility that the Jewish nation enjoyed from the Clouds of Glory in the desert. Today, Israel represents a similar island of tranquility in a sea of turmoil in the Middle East. ■

Demonstrating Wisdom – Shabbat Chol Hamoed

The wise man, his eyes are in his head (Ecclesiastes 2:14)

החכם עיניו בראשו (קהלת ב:יד)

As the Sages in the Midrash (Kohelet Rabbah) wondered about the strange verse in Ecclesiastes which states that the wise man’s eyes are “in his head” (2:14) they asked: “And are the fool’s eyes in his feet?” The Midrash explains that the verse teaches us that before a wise man takes a leadership role in a matter, he foresees the effects and outcome of his actions. The Talmud (2:9) codified this notion teaching us, “Who is the wise man? He is one who sees the outcome [of future events].” A wise man has eyes in his head because he has the ability to look forward and recognize how events will unfold.

Ecclesiastes describes wisdom as the ability to recognize the direction of events and take action. This description depicts the wisdom of American leaders who recognize the danger of a nuclear Iran and are taking action to prevent it.

The Senate overwhelmingly approved a recent resolution that reaffirms U.S. efforts to stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and says that containment of a nuclear-capable Iran is not an option, the [Associated Press](#) reported. By a vote of 90-1, the Senate backed the nonbinding measure that states that “it is a vital national interest of the United States to prevent the Government of Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.” The measure was introduced in February by Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Bob Casey (D-PA), and Joe Lieberman (I-CT). It endorses continued economic and diplomatic pressure on Tehran until it agrees to suspension of its uranium enrichment program in compliance with U.N. Security Council resolutions, cooperates with international inspectors and reaches a permanent agreement that its program is for peaceful purposes. As President Barack Obama has said, “When faced with a regime that threatens global security and denies the Holocaust and threatens to destroy Israel, the United States will do everything in our power to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.” We must laud our elected officials and thank them for recognizing the true threat that Iran poses to the world. For more on the current legislative priorities that will strengthen American and Israeli security, click [here](#).

Following the Midrash’s description of the wise that have “eyes in their head,” U.S. elected officials are taking action and wisely recognizing the danger that a nuclear Iran presents to international peace and America’s global interests. ■

A Source of Water – Shemini Atzeret

He makes the wind blow and the rain descend (Prayer for Rain) (משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם) (תפילת גשם)

The Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1:2) notes that while the world is judged on Rosh Hashanah, “on Sukkot, [the world] is judged on water.” For this reason, water plays a prominent role throughout the holiday of Sukkot. From the *hoshanot* prayers recited each day of the holiday culminating with the plea for rain on Hoshanah Rabbah, on the seventh day of Sukkot, to the Prayer for Rain added to the Mussaf service on Shemini Atzeret, the Sukkot liturgy consistently emphasizes the critical role of water for a successful crop in the new year. The Torah specifically calls for a special water-pouring service at the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem, which served as a prayer for a year of plentiful rain.

Water plays a prominent role throughout the holiday of Sukkot. The importance of water also exists in modern Israeli culture as scientists work to develop technologies that could provide water to arid areas of Africa.

An Israeli desalination company, IDE Technologies, has made many advances in desalination technology, installing over 400 desalination plants in 40 countries including the United States. However, desalination plants are prohibitively costly for less-developed nations. [NoCamels.com](#) recently reported researchers from the Zuckerberg Institute for Water Research at Ben Gurion University of the Negev worked with central Arava R&D to find a way to utilize solar energy at a fraction of the cost. The new innovation uses solar energy panels to power the pumps of a desalination unit that generates clean water for crops. The technology utilizes unique nanofiltration membranes that enable farmers to decide which minerals should be retained from the water to feed various types of crops, a method which requires much less energy. Recent tests of the system near the Dead Sea demonstrated that farmers can use up to 25 percent less water and fertilizer than what has usually been needed in that area. Ben Gurion University’s Rami Messalem, a researcher on the project, explained that the system is “based on the premise that it can be used in poor countries, in places where you don’t have an electricity source—as a standalone system.” For more on how Israel has helped countries in need, click [here](#).

As we pray for a rain-filled winter season in Israel, we can also take pride in the fact that Israel continues to develop technologies which bring badly needed water to impoverished, arid countries around the world. ■

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