

SEPTEMBER 16, 2013

Sukkot

A Symbol of Faith

I situated the children of Israel in booths (Leviticus 23:43) (ויקרא כג:מג) בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל

Numerous commentators note the essential element of faith inherent in the act of sitting in the *sukkah*. We are commanded to leave our safe, sturdy homes for the frail, faulty shelter of the *sukkah*. In fact, the *sukkah* must be, by the traditional definition, open to the skies with the stars visible. Rabbi Yosef Zvi Dushinsky explained (see Talelei Orot, Sukkot Vol. 1 p. 139) that the word Sukkot is written in the Torah its short form (סכות) and not in its longer form (סוכות), to remind us that overly thick *schach* (used as the roof of the *sukkah*) renders the *sukkah* not kosher. This frailty is meant to instill within us a sense of faith and trust in divine protection of the Jewish people.

The frailty of a *sukkah* reminds us of our physical frailty and instills within us a sense of faith. Sadly, our friends living in Israel do not need to sit in a *sukkah* to be reminded of the dangers that exist in the world.

While Israel has always faced grave dangers from its neighbors, recent events serve as a powerful reminder of the danger ever present throughout the Middle East. The alarming use of [chemical weapons](#) in Syria, just 50 miles from the Jewish state's border, forced Israel to issue its citizens gas masks in the case of a potential attack by Syria or other neighboring countries. Last month, 24 Egyptian policemen were killed in an [attack](#) by suspected militants in the Sinai, raising new fears about the growing number of jihadist terrorists roaming the lawless peninsula and their ability to launch attacks over the border into Israel. Earlier in August, four IDF soldiers were injured when their convoy was hit by [Hezbollah explosives](#), which was, according to Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, a targeted and premeditated attempt to kill Israelis. Just a day before that, Israel's Iron Dome defense system [intercepted](#) a Grad rocket bound for the Israeli southern resort city of Eilat. An al-Qaeda linked group in the Sinai Peninsula claimed responsibility for the attack saying, "Jews will pay the price." And, as we speak, Iran's illicit [nuclear weapons](#) program continues unabated, as it installs new, more effective centrifuges, enriches uranium, and produces the heavy water necessary to build a nuclear weapon. While these developments are truly frightening, we cannot allow ourselves to throw up our hands in despair. Rather, we must do our part to help keep Israel safe. With so many threats in the region, Israel's strong friendship with the United States is more important than ever, and the work we do to maintain that relationship is crucial to ensuring the continued safety and security of the Jewish state.

As we sit in our temporary, exposed *sukkahs*, we must think about the citizens of Israel who remain exposed to the very real threat of attack, and commit ourselves to do everything we can to help keep them safe. ■

The Sukkah of Peace

The shelter of peace (Shabbat Prayer)

סוכת שלום (תפילת שבת)

The evening prayers customarily recited for Shabbat and holidays draw a direct connection between peace and the *sukkah*. We pray, "Spread over us the shelter (*sukkah*) of your peace." What is the connection between the *sukkah* and peace? Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (See Michtav M'elياهو Volume 2, Sukkot, p. 106) writes that because the *sukkah* is by definition, a temporary dwelling, and is certainly less comfortable than in a solid house, sitting in the *sukkah* requires the willingness to forgo physical desires and personal needs. Similarly, "the existence of peace is only possible with

the negation of the [need for] physical satiation...for as long as people yearn for physical, selfish goals, peace is impossible between them, for each wants what his neighbor has, and everything in the possession of his neighbor minimizes his domain..." Thus, when we sit in the *sukkah* and constrain our physical desires, we indicate the willingness to minimize our own needs for a larger goal.

Sitting in the *sukkah* represents the willingness to sacrifice individual needs for the larger goals of peace. This lofty value has guided the state of Israel in its bid to make peace with the Palestinian people.

Recently, as a gesture towards the Palestinian Authority in order to spur continued progress in the ongoing peace talks, the Israeli Cabinet approved 5,000 work permits for Palestinians, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The move represents yet another step that Israel has taken to assert its willingness to make concessions in the interest of peace. Moreover, in August Israel freed over 100 Palestinian prisoners convicted of violent acts of aggression against Israelis in order to encourage the Palestinians to enter the negotiations. While Israel continues to willingly make painful concessions to come to a final peace agreement, the Palestinians continue to backpedal. According to recent [reports](#), despite the fact that the parties agreed to enter into the negotiations without preconditions, "Abbas reassured the Fatah leaders that he would not make any concessions during the negotiations with Israel. 'Our positions are the same as previous ones. This means Jerusalem is at the top of our list of priorities. A Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital. Without that there will be no solution. There will be no state without Jerusalem, which is a red line for us.'" For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

The *sukkah* reminds us that peace can only be achieved with a willingness to make concessions for others. While Israel repeatedly demonstrates this willingness, the PA has yet to internalize the *sukkah's* powerful message. ■

Proof of the Past (Shabbat Chol Hamoed)

There is no remembrance of them of former times (Ecclesiastes 1:11) אין זכרון לראשונים (קהלת א:יא)

In the introductory verses, Ecclesiastes laments that "There is no remembrance of them of former times; neither shall there be any remembrance of them of latter times that are to come, among those that shall come after" (1:11). What does this mean? Rashi (on 1:11) explains that the later generations "would not remember the earlier generations that preceded them." Later generations would deny not only the wisdom and accomplishments of earlier generations, but also their very existence.

Ecclesiastes predicted that as time passed people would forget the past. In our world, many have come to deny Israel's ancient connection to the Holy Land; thankfully, ongoing archaeological finds demonstrate a strong Jewish presence dating many hundreds of years.

Researchers at Israel's Hebrew University recently announced the discovery of a rare trove of Byzantine-era gold and silver artifacts, including an impressive 10-centimeter solid gold medallion "etched with a Menorah, Shofar made from a ram's horn, and a Torah scroll," London's [Daily Mail](#) reported. Professor Eilat Mazar, who heads the well-known dig just outside of Jerusalem's Old City, "described the discovery as a unique find with 'very clear Jewish symbols.'" She told [The Times of Israel](#) that "the hoard of gold and silver objects, found beneath the floor of a Byzantine-era house meters from the massive walls of the Temple Mount, was brought by Jews who returned to the city after the Persians conquered it from the Byzantines in 614 CE" (The mission was quickly denounced as "fake history" in a [statement released by Palestinian authorities](#)). According to Mazar, the treasure trove of gold was meant to help the sparse Jewish community survive hard times or rebuild what the Jews hoped would be a free community under Persian rule. "What is certain is that their mission, whatever it was, was unsuccessful," she said. While their mission failed then, today it has been fully realized, as the Jewish people have returned to rebuild their homeland.

While Ecclesiastes claims that later generations would forget what happened in the past, the treasures left behind by the Jews of the Byzantine-era offer new evidence of Judaism in the Holy Land during ancient times. ■