



Sermon Tidbits

SEPTEMBER 9, 2013

Yom Kippur

40 Years Later (Yizkor)

May the Lord Remember... (Yom Kippur Prayer)

יזכור אלקים את... (תפילה של יום הכיפורים)

While we refer to the Day of Repentance as Yom Kippur, based on the text of the Torah in Leviticus 23:27 it is called Yom Kippurim (in the plural) in Hebrew. Some commentators suggest that this name implies the need for different levels of atonement for different levels of sin. Yet, the Midrash (Sifrei) based on Deuteronomy 21:8, “Forgive your people Israel, whom You have redeemed,” explains: “‘Forgive your people’—this refers to the living; ‘Whom You have redeemed’—this refers to the dead.” Thus, Yom Kippur is referred to in the plural because it offers atonement not only for us, but also for those no longer living as well (See also Be’er Heitev Orach Chayyim 622:8).

As we recite Yizkor on Yom Kippur and remember those no longer with us, we take comfort in the notion that Yom Kippur offers atonement even to those no longer alive. In this spirit, as we remember our loved ones on this holiest of days, we must also offer special prayers for the soldiers who gave their lives during the Yom Kippur War.

Exactly 40 years ago today thousands of Israelis abandoned the sanctity of the synagogue for the chaos of the battlefield as Egypt and Syria suddenly and deliberately attacked the Jewish state on two fronts. Many of those soldiers ultimately sacrificed their lives to protect and defend the people and state of Israel. Today, we recognize that their sacrifice paved the way for two generations of peace. After suffering initial, debilitating losses, Israel’s sound defeat of both the Egyptians and Syrians helped convince many in the Arab world that Israel’s military force could not be defeated, leading to peace movements and delaying indefinitely the Arab ambition of destroying Israel by force, a sentiment that remains in place after 40 years. While there is no peace treaty with Syria, there has been quiet, thanks to the sacrifice of the soldiers of the IDF during the Yom Kippur war. Moreover, though relations with Egypt have at times been tense, Egypt has always upheld its end of the Camp David Accords that established peace between Israel and its southern neighbor—a peace that was also formed, ultimately, as a result of the Yom Kippur War. As we commemorate the 40th anniversary of this historic war, we honor the soldiers who gave their lives to make Israel a stronger and safer place.

During Yizkor, many congregations recite an additional prayer devoted to the fallen Israelis who have been slain in acts of terror or who sacrificed their lives in defense of the Jewish people. As we pray specifically for those who gave their lives 40 years ago in order to give Israel the security and stability it enjoys today, their memories are forever testaments to peace. ■

Recalling the Tragedies

These I shall recall (Mussaf of Yom Kippur)

אלה אזכרה (מוסף של יום הכיפורים)

Traditionally, the Mussaf prayer on Yom Kippur takes a decidedly darker turn from the joyous recollection of the ancient holy service in the Temple that precedes it. We lament the destruction of the Temple, and with it the near destruction of the Jewish people. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (See Yom Kippur Machzor with commentary p. 627) noted that for a brief period of time on Yom Kippur we mourn for tragedies that befell our people. Before we recite the haunting poetic hymn recalling the execution of the Ten Martyrs at the hands of the ancient Roman government,

we plead: “We are destitute, despised, downtrodden...do not make an end of us,”—an indication of the persecution of Jewish communities throughout the centuries of exile.

When our prayers on Yom Kippur turn to tragedies that have befallen the Jewish people throughout the ages, we can also recall the regimes that continue to wish us harm, and the deadly weapons they hope to have at their disposal.

As the West, led by the United States, evaluates how to respond to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, Israel is rapidly working to ensure its civilians have gas masks and are trained on how to use them. The use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime highlights the danger of allowing the world’s most dangerous regimes to possess weapons of mass destruction. This danger is amplified throughout the region as Iran seeks to acquire a nuclear weapons capability. We can only imagine how much more limited our options to deter Assad’s use of chemical weapons would be if his greatest ally, Iran, were using nuclear weapons to create an umbrella of protection for the Assad regime. The Islamic Republic is already expanding its influence throughout the region, moving military equipment and resources into Syria and Lebanon. Now is the time to ramp up the pressure on Iran. The U.S. must continue to increase sanctions on Iran while at the same time quickly and measurably testing new Iranian President Rouhani’s determination to bring about a diplomatic solution to the nuclear dispute.

For more on Syria, including the importance of contacting your members of Congress to authorize the use of force, click [here](#). For more on Iran, click [here](#).

Yom Kippur is a time to recall the great suffering in our people’s history. On this day, we must also do our part to ensure that those—like the Iranian regime—who wish to do harm to the Jewish people never acquire the most dangerous weapons known to mankind. ■

A Community of Individuals

Next year in Jerusalem! (End of Neilah service)

לשנה הבאה בירושלים (סוף תפילת נעילה)

Twice a year we traditionally recite, “Next year in Jerusalem!”—once at the conclusion of the Passover Seder, and also at the end of Yom Kippur. Rabbi Shai Peron (now Israel’s Minister of Education) explained that on Yom Kippur we focus on our individual, private salvation, while on Passover we celebrate our national redemption. The two are intertwined. “Just as we cannot give up on the role of the individual, similarly, we cannot minimize the power and value of the community.” Only when we combine the power of the individual noted on Yom Kippur and the community celebrated on Passover will we merit the vision of “Next year in Jerusalem.”

The Jewish peoples’ greatest achievements happen when the actions of individuals coalesce within the framework of a larger community. Nowhere is this more evident than our success in garnering support for the Jewish state.

As we begin a new year, we can reflect of the tens of thousands of people who worked together last year to educate, advocate, and lobby to create a meaningful and deep connection between the state of Israel and hundreds of members of Congress, thousands of staff members, and countless other leaders of our country. At the same time, no aspect of this work carries more significance than the individual work of each and every pro-Israel advocate who reaches out to establish a meaningful relationship with his or her elected officials, writes letters, makes telephone calls, and uses his or her voice to encourage support for Israel. While professionals provide information, resources and know-how, they count on us, the individual citizens whose voice must be heard for them to be able to work effectively in Washington. Israel advocates have been able to achieve great success precisely because they combine these two powerful forces: the efforts of individual advocates that unite to build an effective, powerful community. To learn more on how to get involved, click [here](#).

Today, when we combine the passion of individual Israel advocates, we create a powerful, effective community that protects, defends and supports the Jewish state of Israel.

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