

OCTOBER 13, 2014

Shemini Atzeret & Bereishit

Dangerous Spillover – Shemini Atzeret

He causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall (Prayer for Rain) (משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם (תפילת גשם))

We begin to “mention” the need for rain in our daily prayers (*mashiv haruach*) immediately following the Prayer for Rain recited on Shemini Atzeret, yet Jews in Israel do not begin to pray for the rain itself until two weeks later. Why wait to pray for the rains to begin? The Mishnah (Taanit 1:3) explains that as thousands of pilgrims had travelled to Jerusalem for the holiday, significant rainfall would hinder their trip home. Rashi (on Ta'anit 10a) writes that they delayed the prayers for the amount of time it would take the most distant traveler to reach the Euphrates River before the rains arrived and flooding made the roads impassable. The entire nation delayed its prayers for rain allowing those who had traveled great distance sufficient time to reach their homes before the onset of the rainy season.

The Sages delayed the prayer for rainfall fearing that “spillover” from the rain would negatively affect the people. In recent months, citizens living on Israel's northern border have suffered from a far more dangerous “spillover” effect.

Late last month, Israel shot down a Syrian jet that crossed into Israeli air space, representing what the [Wall Street Journal](#) called the “latest sign of instability along the Golan Heights frontier stemming from the Syrian civil war.” According to the [New York Times](#), while the Golan Heights were Israel's quietest frontier for four decades, they are ‘now seen by some experts as its most volatile and unpredictable. Syrian insurgents, some aligned with Al Qaeda, have seized border villages, along with the crossing at Quneitra, and the United Nations forces that patrolled the demilitarized zone have mostly evacuated their posts... The military would not provide details about the events it calls ‘*zligah*’—Hebrew for ‘spillover’—other than to say ‘there have not been more than 100.’” These spillover events have the potential to draw the Jewish State into a conflict between radical Islamic militants fighting against a merciless and brutal Assad regime, and also reflect a new difficulty of maintaining peace and quiet without a sovereign Syrian leadership on the other side of the border. The danger includes bombs fired errantly—and sometimes intentionally—at Israel, as well as periodic intentional attacks from other organized terrorist groups, such as the [recent fence bombing](#) perpetrated by Hezbollah which injured two IDF soldiers. As Syria grows increasingly unstable, the danger of spillover increases, threatening to draw the Jewish state into a wider conflict.

As we note the effort the Sages made to avoid damage of spillover from the rain to Jewish travelers, we must also keep working to ensure that Israel has the means and ability to protect its citizens from spillover attacks from Syria. ■

A Painful Separation – Yizkor Shemini Atzeret

On the eighth day you shall have an assembly (Numbers 29:35) (ביום השמיני עצרת (במדבר כט:לה))

Rashi (on verse 36) describes the nature of Shemini Atzeret, and explains why the holiday shares the same root as the word *atzor*, meaning “stop” or “hold back.” Rashi writes, “These [sacrifices] correspond to the Israelites, [as God says to the Children of Israel]: Stay back from Me yet a little. This is an expression of endearment, like children who are departing from their father and he says to them, ‘Your separation is difficult for me.’” We celebrate an additional short holiday to connote the difficulty in separating ourselves from the spirituality of the holiday season before we return to daily life.

While we celebrate Shemini Atzeret and mark the difficulty of separating from God following the holidays, Yizkor on this day reminds us of a different type of separation, as dozens of families mourn children lost over the past year.

When we recite Yizkor on Shemini Atzeret, and the other pilgrimage festivals, we mourn for our loved ones who have gone to eternity. We reflect on their lives and the transitions in our own lives since they passed away. This year, Yizkor takes on an even deeper meaning as we remember the [sixty-seven](#) IDF soldiers who gave their lives this summer in defense of the state of Israel during Operation Protective Edge, permanently separating them from their family and friends. We think too of the [hundreds](#) of members of the U.S. Armed Forces who died defending our freedoms this year. Knowing that every life is sacred, we keep in our hearts the innocent civilians killed in war in 5774. May their families be comforted and may each of their memories always be a blessing.

During the Yizkor, we pray for the memories of our own personal loved ones. But, on Shemini Atzeret, we also remember the difficult separation from those soldiers who gave their lives to protect and defend us all. ■

Evil Intentions - Bereishit

The wickedness of man was great (Genesis 6:5)

כי רבה רעת האדם (בראשית ו:ה)

The description at the end of Parashat Bereishit paints a bleak picture of humanity, "...the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." S'forno (on verse 5) explains that while the first half of the verse describes the past actions of humankind, their "every imagination" refers, "to the future, that they would not listen to rebuke, and there was no hope that they would repent." Not only was their past activity wicked, but they also intended to continue their wickedness into the foreseeable future.

The Torah relates how mankind has not only perpetrated evil in the past, but intended to continue committing acts of wickedness in the future. Recent evidence indicates that this verse aptly describes Hamas' activities as well.

Despite suffering serious military setbacks during the summer conflict with Israel, evidence indicates that rather than focusing on rebuilding Gaza and improving the lives of Gaza's citizens living under their rule, Hamas intends to utilize its energies to rearm itself and rebuild its ability to attack the Jewish state. Almost immediately after the fifty-day ceasefire was announced, [Israel Today reported](#) that Hamas had begun to re-dig the terror tunnels destroyed by the IDF. A senior Israeli official said that "Hamas did not wait a single moment after the last round of fighting, and began its rearmament in anticipation of another round." According to the [Jerusalem Post](#), Israeli Naval vessels thwarted attempts to smuggle weapon manufacturing material into Gaza. Cmdr. Eli Soholitski of Naval Squadron 916, the squadron responsible for defending Israel's coast from Ashdod to the Gaza Strip, noted that the IDF has thwarted numerous attempts to break Israel's closure of the Gaza Strip. He also added that Hamas fires rockets into the sea every few days, as part of its weapons upgrade program. According to [i24News](#), Soholitski added that "The sea is a very convenient platform for smuggling. The terrorists still have one big smuggling tunnel, and it's called the Mediterranean."

U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry's, [participation in the conference to rebuild Gaza](#) demonstrates America's concern for the suffering of Gaza's civilian population. However, the United States must insist that donor countries ensure that a mechanism is in place to prevent Hamas from using building materials to reconstruct terror tunnels and further advance its terrorist infrastructure as it has done in the past.

Sadly, Hamas has given no indication that it has any intention of changing its ways. Like the wicked people described in the Torah, they seem to have every intention of continuing their wicked ways long into the future. ■

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