

OCTOBER 6, 2014

Sukkot

Praying, and Working, for a Rainy Year - Sukkot

Please save! (Sukkot prayer)

הושע נא! (תפילה בסוכות)

Many of the prayers and rituals which surround Sukkot focus on the prayer for an abundant rainy season during the coming winter months. According to one Talmudic position (See Sukkah 37b), we shake the Four Species (Lulav, Etrog, Hadasim and Aravot) in all directions “to prevent harmful winds...and harmful dews.” Moreover the custom of Hoshanot, in which the congregation circles the Bimah holding the four species, emanates from a Temple tradition during which the congregation would circle the altar with long willow (aravah) branches. Willows grow near streams and were carried symbolizing the need for water while praying *Hosha na*, “Please save!”

Numerous Sukkot customs and prayers focus on the critical need for water in Israel and around the world. Yet, in addition to offering prayers, an innovative Israeli has created a system designed to conserve valuable water resources.

Israel is the leading nation in recycled waste water, [repurposing over eighty percent for agricultural use](#), far outpacing second place Spain, which reuses twelve percent. Yet, these systems cannot prevent clean, drinkable rainwater from entering into the contaminated waste system. To meet this need, Israeli high school teacher Amir Yechieli, founded [Yevul Mayim](#) in Jerusalem, developing a large-scale rooftop rain collection system. [Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) reports that in Israel alone, Yechieli’s water collection systems save about 100 days of water use a year at the schools where 120 of his systems are in operation. When installing a system in a school, he not only saves the school’s needed resources and Israel’s precious water, he also uses the system to teach students about water conservation and environmentalism. A number of African communities and schools have expressed interest in Yechieli’s simple system, which uses small drums to filter rain water and store it for future use. He hopes to install his systems in schools in Uganda and Haiti.

As we pray on Sukkot for an abundant, rainy winter, we also laud the efforts of a dedicated Israeli whose innovation is helping to conserve precious water resources. ■

Wasted Energy

One who makes his Sukkah under a tree (Sukkah 1:2)

העושה סוכתו תחת האילן (סוכה א:ב)

Rabbinic tradition has a number of idioms to convey the wasted effort of engaging in a pointless exercise. Rabbi Ada bar Ahava (see Taanit 16a) said that a person who confessed his sin but expressed neither regret nor intention to change his ways could be compared to one who “immersed himself in a mikveh while clinging to an [impure] rodent.” (*Tovel v’sheretz b’yado*) We find a similar expression of wasted energy regarding the construction of a Sukkah, which must be erected as a temporary structure under the open sky. The Mishnah (Sukkah 1:2) writes, “One who makes his Sukkah under a tree—it is as if he made it inside the house.” Building a sukkah under a tree ignores the essence of what a Sukkah represents, and is essentially a waste of effort and energy.

The Sages used the image of building a sukkah indoors to reflect the notion of wasted effort and energy. In his recent speech at the United Nations, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alluded to several other types of wasted effort.

Last week, during his [powerful speech to the United Nations](#), Netanyahu noted two examples that potentially represented wasted effort and energy. While he commended the international community's desire to combat the spread of ISIS, a regime dedicated to the violent spread of radical Islam, he noted that such efforts would ultimately prove futile should the world lose focus and allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons. "Would you let ISIS enrich uranium? Would you let ISIS build a heavy water reactor? Would you let ISIS develop intercontinental ballistic missiles? Of course you wouldn't. Then you mustn't let the Islamic State of Iran do those things either... To defeat ISIS and leave Iran as a threshold nuclear power is to win the battle and lose the war."

Netanyahu also addressed the efforts of the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate Israel rather than Hamas for war crimes during the recent action in Gaza over the summer. He noted, "By investigating Israel rather than Hamas for war crimes, the U.N Human Rights Council has betrayed its noble mission to protect the innocent. In fact, what it's doing is to turn the laws of war upside-down. Israel, which took unprecedented steps to minimize civilian casualties, Israel is condemned. Hamas, which both targeted and hid behind civilians—that a double war crime—Hamas is given a pass. The Human Rights Council is thus sending a clear message to terrorists everywhere: Use civilians as human shields. ...By granting international legitimacy to the use of human shields, the U.N.'s Human Rights Council has thus become a Terrorist Rights Council."

Building a Sukkah indoors is a wasted effort that ignores the essence of what a Sukkah represents. We must insist that the world cease building "indoor Sukkahs" and instead focus its energy on efforts that truly promote peace, safety and security around the world. ■

Walking in Darkness

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

החכם עיניו בראשו (קהלת ב:יד)

In Ecclesiastes (attributed to King Solomon) read on Shabbat Chol Hamoed, the author writes that, "The wise man, his eyes are in his head; but the fool walks in darkness." The Talmud (Yerushalmi Sotah 8:10) wonders, "Does the fool have eyes in his feet?" Rather, the Talmud explains that this phrase means that the wise man takes a long view, and is able to envision the outcome of his actions over time. S'forno similarly adds that the "fool walks in darkness" because he follows a path without any consideration for troubles which may result in the future.

Fulfilling the admonition of Ecclesiastes, President Mahmoud Abbas has chosen to walk in darkness by aligning the Palestinian Authority with Hamas, slandering Israel and rejecting peace efforts of the United States.

In a disturbing [address to the United Nations](#), Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas accused Israel of "waging a war of genocide in Gaza, and called Israel's actions in Gaza over the summer, "a series of absolute war crimes carried out before the eyes and ears of the entire world." Even more troubling than Abbas' divisive language of incitement and hatred is his determination to rebuff both Israel and the United States, and continue to seek one-sided steps that not only won't bring peace, but will harm the Palestinian population. According to the [Jerusalem Post](#), last week Abbas threatened to join the International Criminal Court at The Hague, in the event that his efforts at the U.N. Security Council to set a timetable forcing the withdrawal of Israel to the pre-1967 lines should fail. In a recent editorial, the [Washington Post](#) wrote that Abbas persists in "grandstanding gestures that he must know will only delay the serious negotiations that must precede the creation of a Palestinian state." An enduring peace between Israel and the Palestinians can only arise through direct talks between the parties themselves. President Abbas must return to bilateral negotiations with Israel and refrain from counter-productive, unilateral steps that only inhibit the prospect for peace.

To date, Palestinian President Abbas' has chosen to walk in darkness, ignoring the future repercussions of his actions. The U.S. must encourage him to act with "eyes in his head," making the hard choices that will benefit his people. ■

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