



Sermon Tidbits

SEPTEMBER 27, 2015

Shabbat Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret

The Sukkah of Peace

He who spreads the Sukkah of peace (Friday evening prayers)

הפורש סוכת שלום (ערבית של שבת)

Last year, in the shadow of the aftermath of the difficult and painful war in Gaza, at the invitation of Mr. Issa Jaber, mayor of the Arab town of Abu, a small group of Israelis and Arabs gathered in Abu Gosh in what they called a “Sukkat Shalom,” a “Sukkah of Peace.” Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish, the Founding Director, and now Senior Advisor, of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel, [wrote](#) that at the meeting, which included members of the nearby kibbutzim of Kiryat Anavim, Ma’aleh Hahamisha and Tzora, participants, “spoke of their decades of friendship and cooperation on educational and social projects and programs for the benefit of Jews and Arabs alike in the region known as ‘the Jerusalem Corridor,’ where Jews and Arabs actually live in total harmony and mutual respect. ‘We respect each other,’ Mr. Jaber said, ‘despite the differences among us.’”

Jewish tradition paired the values of Sukkot and peace in our liturgy. At the conclusion of the final blessing of *Arvit* (the evening prayer) on Shabbat and holidays, we end the *hashkivenu* section by blessing God as, “*haporesh sukkat Shalom*”—“the one who spreads the Sukkah of peace [upon us, and upon all of Israel, and upon Jerusalem.]” What is the connection between the Sukkah and the notion of peace? Rabbi S. R. Hirsch offers a fascinating explanation connecting the Sukkah to the idea of peace. He writes, “The *schach* [roof covering] and the walls symbolize eternal peace from which we derive the commandments of the Sukkah: Go and see this Sukkah! You can build it from hewn stone or from light beams - and [the material from which the walls are built] has no impact on the kashrut of the Sukkah. Both with this and that [material] peace can reign, and from both of them can peace flee. Peace in the home and joy in the home depend on entirely different conditions. The essence is the nature of the home which are only surrounded by the walls, and the nature of the family unit...” (B’maagalei Hashanah 143) According to Hirsch, the Sukkah reminds us that physical elements of a home—the material from which the walls are constructed—have little impact on the status of peace within that home. Rather, peace reigns due to the attitude within that home; from a desire for coexistence and harmony. Mutual trust and understanding transforms a Sukkah of flimsy canvas walls into a *Sukkat Shalom*. When enmity and distrust pervade, even the strongest stone walls cannot form a Sukkah of peace.

Over a period of many years, Israel has made numerous, significant sacrifices for the sake of peace, in the hopes of creating a Sukkat Shalom throughout the Middle East. Israel relinquished the entire Sinai Peninsula in the 1970’s, when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made his heroic visit to the Knesset and expressed a genuine desire for peace. Israel has achieved peace with Jordan, and has made numerous tangible steps in the hopes of rekindling peace talks with the Palestinians. Yet, average Israelis fail to sense the desire for true peace on the part of Palestinian leadership.

Recent events surrounding the Temple Mount raise serious questions about the Palestinian leadership’s desire for peace. In a [video statement](#) after recent clashes on the Temple Mount, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said that, “Al Aqsa is ours, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is ours, it is all ours. They have no right to defile them with their filthy feet, and we will not allow them.” Violence spread to surrounding villages, where a [rock attack killed Mevaseret Zion resident Alexander Levlovitz](#), who was driving home from a Rosh Hashanah dinner. Responding to Abbas’ disturbing statement, Israeli Foreign Ministry Director General Dore Gold [said that](#), “Today the world is divided between those trying to undermine religious coexistence and those trying to protect it. By saying that the

‘filthy feet’ of Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount desecrate it, Mahmoud Abbas has now clarified on which side he stands.”

The world, together with Israel, yearns for a Sukkat Shalom. Yet, this can only occur if the Palestinian leadership expresses a true desire for coexistence and trust. Mr. Abbas must follow the example of Abush Gosh mayor Issa Jaber and halt his inflammatory and hateful statements. Only when Mr. Abbas instead issues measured statements aimed at reconciliation and coexistence will he build the foundation for the Sukkat Shalom for which we all yearn. ■

Water Awareness and the Prayer for Rain – Shemini Atzeret

For life, and not for death (Prayer for Rain)

להיים ולא למוות (תפילת גשם)

Today we don’t give water much thought. We turn on the faucet, flush the toilet, run the washing machine and the water is just there. Perhaps due to human nature, we assume that just as it always has been there it always will be there. In our generation, we have never known the toil of drawing water from the well. We have never truly known the fear of drought, watching our crops wither and die, wondering how we’ll survive through the year. And thankfully we’ve also taken the safety of our water for granted, drinking our water without fear that it carries with it pollutants, chemicals, or disease. With this reality, we have taken water for granted, mistreating it, and wasting it, as if it was an unlimited resource which would never run out. Today, we are beginning to recognize that water doesn’t come from the faucet. Someone must collect it, clean and purify and deliver it. More importantly, it must be present in the well to collect.

Judaism has always included this basic need for water—and the life it sustains—in our prayers. Jewish tradition long connected adherence to the strictures of the Torah with the blessing of rain. In the second paragraph of Shema we cite the verse which states, “And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day... that I will give the rain of your land in its season... and you shall eat and be satisfied...” (Deuteronomy 11:13-15) We emphasize our dependence upon the need for rain most explicitly on Shemini Atzeret, during the Prayer for Rain which we add during the Mussaf Service. It is not coincidental that we recite the Prayer for Rain and add the additional mention of God as “*Mashiv Haruach u’morid Hagashem*”—“the one who blows the wind and brings the rain,” during the second blessing of the Amidah, which is called “*Techiyat Hametim*”—the “Revival of the Dead.” Every time rain falls in abundance we are revived once again, renewed with the gift of water crucial to sustain life. The Sages wove water awareness into Jewish consciousness through the mechanism of prayer.

As we focus during Shemini Atzeret on the wondrous connection between our faith and the water which God provides us to live and thrive, we can also take great pride in the great Israeli innovations which today form some of the crucial building blocks that will provide water to an increasingly populous and thirsty world. In his [newly released book](#), *Let There Be Water*, author Seth Siegel describes many numerous solutions Israel developed to create a unified water policy that not only made Israel’s desert bloom, but also hold the key to a world facing the challenges of climate change and population growth. Among the many famous innovations including desalination, drip water irrigation and digital water monitoring technology, Israel initiated a much more basic but critical change: awareness. Siegel, throughout the book emphasizes how “water has always been considered a precious commodity in the Land of Israel.” That attitude, more than anything else, drove the water innovation for which Israel is so well known.

Barbara Kingsolver, in an essay entitled [Water is Life](#) wrote, “Water is life. It’s the briny broth of our origins, the pounding circulatory system of the world, a precarious molecular edge on which we survive. It makes up two-thirds of our bodies, just like the map of the world; our vital fluids are saline, like the ocean. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. Even while we take Mother Water for granted, humans understand in our bones that she is the boss. We stake our civilizations on the coasts and mighty rivers. Our deepest dread is the threat of having too little moisture—or too much.” We must internalize the message of *Tefillat Hageshem*, and learn to appreciate each and every drop. When we do that, we can then follow Israel’s lead, and once again make America bloom from “sea to shining sea.” ■

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