



Sermon Tidbits

OCTOBER 19, 2016

Chol Hamoed Sukkot-Shemini Atzeret

Wandering from Sukkah to Sukkah No More – Chol Hamoed

You shall dwell in booths (Leviticus 23:42)

בסכת תשבו (ויקרא כג:מב)

The Prince of Mansheim (Germany) once asked the Chief Rabbi of Berlin (~1800) Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Berliner: Why do the Jews only ask *Mah Nishtanah* (“Why is this night different?”) on Passover, and not [also] on Sukkot? After all, on Sukkot the child notices many changes from a normal meal; should he not ask?” Rabbi Berliner answered that on Passover, “The child experiences elements that are diametrically opposite to the Jewish experience: the family sits around the table in peace, as free people, without distractions. So he wonders: What has changed? Where have we found this sudden security and tranquility? On the other hand, on Sukkot when he sees his family leave the house for the Sukkah, this for the child is natural and self-explanatory, for he knows that the Jews are a wandering people, never sure that their home is their home. For this reason, [on Sukkot] the child sees no reason to ask any questions.” (See *Mei’Otzareinu Hayashan*, vol. III p. 58) This bitter response reveals a sad truth about Jews portrayed in much of our history. A Jewish child would indeed have found the notion of safety and security more peculiar and unusual than the need to uproot ourselves for yet another temporary dwelling, for we were indeed a wandering people. We were without a true land to call our home—until the birth of the Jewish state. In its Declaration of Independence, Israel’s founding fathers noted the United Nations recognition of the right of the Jewish people to establish their state, and [wrote that](#), “This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.”

Sadly, many member states of the United Nations have forgotten this message. Different arms of the United Nations have continued efforts to delegitimize Israel. This month, the 58-member Executive Board of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) [adopted a Palestinian-initiated resolution](#) that ignores Jewish ties to Jerusalem’s Temple Mount and the Western Wall, the two holiest sites in Judaism, the [Jerusalem Post reported](#). Earlier this year, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) [targeted Israel with a commercial boycott, calling for the creation of a database](#)—akin to a “blacklist”—of companies that operate in or have business relationships beyond Israel’s 1949 Armistice Lines, including East Jerusalem. Both represent attempts to isolate and question Israel’s legitimacy as the homeland of the Jewish people.

While the UNESCO resolution passed, American friends of the Jewish state stood beside her. This month, a group of 39 U.S. lawmakers [signed a bipartisan letter](#) which called on UNESCO to oppose a resolution that would challenge Jewish and Christian historical ties to the Old City of Jerusalem. In the letter, initiated by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) to the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the lawmakers from both houses of Congress slammed what they called the UN’s “obsessive hostility towards Israel,” criticizing “another blatantly biased resolution that unjustly singles out our close ally Israel with false accusations and criticism, and attempts to erase the specific deep-rooted, historical connection of Jews and Christians to Jerusalem, Israel’s eternal capital.” In a similar vein, Senators Rob Portman (R-OH) and Ben Cardin (D-MD) [introduced the bipartisan Protecting Israel Against Economic Discrimination Act](#), opposing the UNHRC “blacklist” resolution. Senator Portman said that, “The United States must support Israel by using the considerable economic and diplomatic tools at our disposal to stand up to this economic discrimination against our ally.” Senator Cardin, Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee added that, “We should not stand idle when foreign countries or international governmental organizations use BDS tactics to isolate one of our key allies. We cannot allow these attempts to bypass direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians to go unchecked.”

Today our people must no longer wander from “sukkah” to “sukkah” in search of yet another temporary home, for today we have a home; the state of Israel. At this time of year, we must also thank those friends of Israel who stand against attempts to question Israel’s legitimacy in the international community, and who help ensure that Israel remain the eternal homeland of the Jewish people. ■

Praying (and Working) for Water – Shemini Atzeret

Please O Lord bring salvation now (Sukkot Prayer)

הושע נא (תפילה של סוכות)

Israel’s water technology innovations have been heralded as a boon not just for the Jewish state, but for a growing global population facing a changing climate and a dwindling water supply. While these amazing accomplishments have indeed begun to benefit people around the world, including in the United States, this by no means implies that we have solved the pressing global need for water. The [Washington Post wrote](#) about a recently published article in Scientific Reports suggesting that the five-year-old drought in California could be bigger than anyone thought and last for many decades. According to an [Atlantic Magazine](#) article called, “A Mega-Drought Is Coming to America’s Southwest,” if we don’t soon find a way to dramatically reduce carbon emissions, “the risk of a region-altering disaster in Arizona and New Mexico will exceed 99 percent.” Even with our incredible technological advances, global water continues to decrease. In that light, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret represent an ideal opportunity to focus on those needs.

The pressing need for rain comprises a central theme throughout the Sukkot holiday. Today, many synagogues recite *Hoshanot*, during which the congregation circles the bimah carrying the lulav and etrog. This ritual commemorates a similar rite performed in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem which focused specifically on the need for rain during the coming winter season. The Sages in the Mishnah explain that the priests would gather *aravot* (willow) branches which symbolized the need for rain, as they grow primarily at the banks of streams and rivers. “They then came and leaned them up against the sides of the altar so that their tops drooped [one cubit] over the top of the altar. They sounded a *tekiah* [a long blast] and a *teruah* [several short blasts] and again a *tekiah*. Every day they [the priests] would go around the altar once and they would say: ‘Please O Lord bring salvation now! Please O Lord bring success now!’” (*Sukkah* 4:5) These prayers and rituals culminate in the Prayer for Rain recited before Mussaf on Shemini Atzeret. Throughout the ages, Jews around the world focused their prayers for rain on the specific agricultural needs of the Jewish community in the Holy Land.

Today, our awareness of Israel’s water needs is greater than ever. Anyone with an Internet connection has [immediate access to the exact level of the Kinneret](#), which is Israel’s major reservoir of fresh water. Unfortunately, the Kinneret is drying up, and so much so that an [island recently appeared in its midst](#). Last winter was especially dry in Israel’s north, so Israel is now considering drilling deep wells in the Golan, [Ha’aretz reported](#). At the same time, Israel recently committed to [doubling the supply of Kinneret water it supplies to Jordan](#) up to 100 million cubic meters annually, and is in the process of building a pipeline to provide its neighbor with desperately needed drinking water. According to the Israeli newspaper [Israel Today](#), “The deputy head of the Kinneret Authority told Israel’s Ynet news portal that ‘everyone needs to pray for a rainy winter.’”

In the United States, we will of course pray for a rainy winter not only for Israel, but for the entire world. Last month, the Senate overwhelmingly passed the Water Resources Development Act of 2016 (WRDA) authorizing 25 critical U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects in 17 states, including three provisions to advance the U.S.-Israel water relationship. The House passed its version on Sept. 28, with only one of the three provisions included. As the bill moves to conference for reconciliation, we must work to ensure that all three provisions remain in the final legislation, giving the U.S. the greatest possible access to advanced Israeli water technology. As we focus today on the growing need for water around the world, we must commit ourselves to combine our prayers with concrete action that will not only assist Israel, but will also bring crucial water technologies to the United States. ■

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