



Sukkot: Raising Our Sukkah As A Beacon of Hope to All

What's to be our kavanah, our focused intention, as we assemble and raise up our sukkah this year?

From the time of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, the festival of Sukkot has been a joyous occasion.

But how can we joyously celebrate when thousands of Americans—fellow citizens, co-workers, neighbors, friends, family, and even some of us—are inconsolably grieving for dear ones who lie buried in rubble?

Moreover, how are we to celebrate with the prospect of war before us? Do we have any idea of what this coming war will mean for us? Will it take scores, hundreds, or thousands of our loved ones? How many noncombatants will die? And what kind of killers will it make of us and our children?

The President has proclaimed that we are in a new kind of 21st century war. Like Israel, we are now confronted by warfare that is strategically calculated—as

with all conflict waged in earnest—to go *outside of our experience* as the targeted enemy.

Our national experience of warfare is with *overt* engagement of other nations, or engagement with armies and authorities that openly have national aspirations. The very idea of national states or authorities engaging in *covert* warfare is virtually unknown to us, notwithstanding our recognition of state-sanctioned terrorism, which up to now we have not considered “warfare.”

How are we to understand these attacks as *warfare*?

Regardless of what we learn about their ultimate sponsorship, given the money and legitimization that makes this violence possible, is it reasonable to assume that the purpose is to intimidate our government from supporting Israel or to force a change in U.S. policies on global development?

Even a megalomaniac or an ideological fanatic would

have no such illusions. It requires no particular strategic *sechel* (“smarts”) to figure out that the United States is not going to be intimidated or deterred, but instead angered and unified by such an attack. Even the most committed terrorist would understand



that if the equation to be affected is the balance of power in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these acts of terrorism will have no effect beneficial to Palestinian interests.

If the objective of those who are waging this war against us is not to influence American policy-making, then what should we imagine is its purpose?

(Continued on page 3.)

Mark Your Calendar: October 5 & 19— Shabbat Evening Services & Dinners

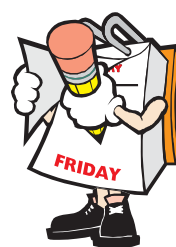
Kehillat Kharakim will offer Friday evening egalitarian services and Shabbat dinners on October 5 and 19 at the home of Rabbi Moshe and Khulda.

Services begin at 6:30 p.m. and include English and Hebrew prayers and singing.

After services there is a blessing of the children and a

sit-down dinner.

Dinner is followed by a readers’ theatre Torah-drama, and zemirot (table songs).



Everyone who comes is invited to bring a contribution to the tisch (table) in the form of a short story, a song, or a brief reading that’s related to Shabbat generally or the Torah parsha (portion) for the week.

Call (323) 934-2925 for information, location, and to hold a place.

Inside this Issue

Noach: Shortest Distance Between Two Points	2
Sukkot: A Beacon of Hope to All (con’t.)	3
For Young People: Like the Wings of a Dove?	3
About Kehillat Kharakim	4
Pastoral Counseling Available	4

Otzar—Treasure

R. Yehoshua b. Levi said: What is the meaning of the passage, “Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem” (Psalms 122:2)? It means: How were we able to withstand our enemies in war? Because within the gates of Jerusalem the scholars were engaged in Torah study [so that we would fight according to God’s will and thus be blessed in our battles]. (Makkot 10a)

Noach: Shortest Distance Between Two Points

Once at an oneg after Friday evening services, two women who were born Jewish were gossiping about another member of their congregation. They were proclaiming to one another that the woman they were talking about had told other members of the congregation that she was Jewish when in fact she was not, since her mother had converted to Christianity. Both of the women who were gossiping seemingly imagined themselves to be righteously exposing a fraud.

Imagine, however, their potential effect. They might recruit allies, one by one, who before long destroy the harmony of the whole congregation—which is not uncommon in synagogues. As Rabbi Yitzchak Arama said: “One can conceive of the universe [of a congregation] as an orchestra in which each instrument plays its assigned part. Should an instrument fail consistently, the disharmony created will disable the entire orchestra.” (Akeidat Yitzchak)

Regardless of whether or not the woman they were talking about was Jewish, which in fact she was, should their behavior be considered *righteous* or *self-righteous*?

The question is troubling for many Jews because, apart from the issue of gossip, the thought that each of us personally should aspire to *righteousness* strikes us as incongruent with our day-to-day realities, maybe even arrogant.

It is said about Noach that “. . . he was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with God” (Genesis 6:9) “Noach is praised for not following the wicked ways of the age of Enosh, but for choosing to serve his maker. . . . He didn’t make common cause with the people of the generation of the deluge.” (Akeidat Yitzchak)

Why should Noach be praised for “not following the wicked ways of the age”?

We may better understand the praise of Noach by recalling the difficulty many of us have avoiding the evil of lashon hara—literally, evil tongue: gossip—which makes us easy prey to self-righteousness. Think of the times when you have stood by in silence or even affirmed, by word or facial expression, destructive gossip that was rationalized by self-righteousness.

It’s not easy to challenge such behavior. Often we fear the rejection that may ensue, or we simply don’t know how to rebuke with kindness. Our commentator Sforno tells us, however, that “. . . [Noach] walked in God’s ways, doing good to others and reproving his contemporaries. . . .”

“. . . The word תמים [i.e., perfect or

blameless] is a reference to Noach’s lifestyle. . . .”—the way he lived day-to-day. “He chose to be more considerate than required by law.” (Or Hachayim) Noach’s behavior epitomized לִפְנֵי מִשְׁרַת הַדִּין, going beyond what the Torah teaches is the minimum we are required to do.

Going back to that Friday oneg, common decency and kindness, never mind the commandments against self-righteousness and gossip, should have prevented those two women from publicly disparaging the Jewish credentials of another person.

But regarding the commentaries, our dean of commentators, Rashi, tells us: “The reason the children are not immediately mentioned [in this chapter, which begins, “these are the generations”] is to teach you that the real generations or offspring of righteous people are good deeds”—that is, mitzvot.

The mitzvot are integral to our day-to-day existence. Self-righteousness is forbidden because of what it leads to—behavior, such as lashon hara, which poisons and ultimately destroys individual lives and whole communities. Not surprisingly, then, the root of the Hebrew word for one who walks upright, a person who is righteous, is ישר, which our rabbis teach us means the shortest distance between two points: the distance from here to a higher education, from here to a successful marriage, from here to a fulfilling family life, from here to whatever worthy goal we seek.



“When the Torah employs the reflexive [form of the verb to walk] הִתְהַלֵּךְ, this merely emphasizes that Noach *kept* walking with God.” (Or Hachayim) He wasn’t deterred by the fads or fashions of his time or by fear of ridicule or rejection from those who mocked his kind of commitment to righteousness.

We should understand that he lived in a time that, in many ways, was not unlike our own—“his generation was guilty of random violence,” and all that goes with it. (Rabbeinu Bachya) “The wantonness of this generation [of Noach] was in a measure due to the ideal conditions under which

mankind lived before the flood. . . . [and] they grew insolent.” (Legends of the Jews)

Rabbeinu Bachya teaches that the reflexive conjugation of the verb “to walk,” הִתְהַלֵּךְ, should be understood to mean, “he [Noach] made himself walk” with God. We should understand, too, that the avoidance of self-righteousness is the outcome of disciplining ourselves to walk with God.

What, finally, is self-righteousness but the result of an arrogance that each of us thinks our self to be the author of all principles and rules for the conduct of social life. Do we imagine in such arrogance that we are superior teachers and judges of morality, or are we simply experiencing a failure of imagination or its opposite, a flight of fantasy? Who among us would replace the wisdom of the Torah with their own personal moral vision—calling all the rest of us to him or her as the arbiter and promoter of moral law?

Incidentally, regarding the woman whose Jewish credentials were the subject of malicious public gossip: One is Jewish if one’s mother, maternal grandmother, great grandmother, etc., were Jewish. It doesn’t matter, according to halakha (Jewish law) if two or three or five generations back, one of those women who was born Jewish or legitimately converted to Judaism, subsequently converted to Christianity or some other religion, even if she was baptized or otherwise formally renounced Judaism. All of her offspring through her maternal descendants are nonetheless Jewish.

There is a story about how the hasidim asked their rabbi (the Seer of Lublin), Who is greater, [one who is] “perfectly righteous” or [one who has] “great” standing in the world?

He told them: “. . . You too go out and see. If someone comes to recite a בְּרָכָה [blessing over bread] and there are two loaves in front of him—one is a large loaf of bread but sliced, not complete, and one is small but complete—on which of them does he say the blessing of הַבְּרָכָה. Do you do so on the large one that is sliced or on the small one that is whole? [The דָּין is that you recite it on the on the more complete one.] You learn from this that if you have a choice between something that is whole and complete, yet small, and something large and incomplete, the small but complete thing is preferred.” (Al Hatorah)

A righteous Jew, including one whose family has not practiced Judaism for even one generation, is to be preferred to an incomplete Jew who self-righteously engages in destructive gossip, even one born to ten generations of Jews.

Sukkot: A Beacon of Hope to All (con't.)

Let's begin to answer that question by supposing that the leaders of several nations, allied covertly with leaders of a radical Islamic movement, are the sponsors and supporters of an organized army of infiltrators who are trained to kill relatively large numbers of innocent civilians. The war is waged by a radical faction of Islamic leaders with the covert connivance and charter of leaders of national states.

Their shared purpose, ironically, may be comparable with that which presumably motivated the attack on the American ship U.S.S. Cole. The strategic goal is to unify the Arab world behind the radical Islamic movement and its leaders, overt and covert, consolidating and dramatically escalating their power, by demonstrating their where-withal to cut the United States down to size and humble us in the eyes of Arab peoples.

How do they plan to do that?

The armies they have arrayed against us are comprised of terrorist cells rather than conventional military divisions. Their soldiers are not courageous uniformed patriots but ideological fighters in civilian clothing who are actively seeking sainthood and martyrdom.

Their primary objective is not to win battles and defeat us in the present, but their own future elevation as an historic world power.

Our enemy is motivated by pretensions to lead an historic battle against the spread of Western freedom, democracy, and justice into their world, an intrusion that undermines their consolidation of radical Islamic power, which they imagine in time will wash over the world of "infidels."

But if we're entering a war of such historic proportions, how *in God's name* shall we spread over us a sukkah of peace in this festival season?

Each of us may raise up our sukkah as a beacon of hope to one and all—a hope not just that God's peace will again descend upon us, upon Israel, and upon all humankind, but that if we must, we shall wage a *just war by God*.

Let's illuminate the darkness we face with the light that if we must defend ourselves in battle, we know to do so *not* in the mistaken jingoistic belief that God is on our

side, but that we may choose as Jews and Americans to be on God's side—never to harm the innocent, never to destroy wantonly, never to prolong needlessly the pain and suffering of war—and choose to hold our leaders accountable to such convictions.

Let's turn our sukkah into a spiritual high-rise, at least partially filling the void left by those towers and the souls that were in them, which were taken from us so painfully. Let's engage everyone we know—relatives, friends, and neighbors, of every religion and every creed—to help us build and occupy our sukkah.

Let's choose one night of the festival to include them all in a moment of Talmud Torah, one which lights the path to make the war before us as just as we can make it. Let that be our first contribution to the "war effort" as Jewish Americans and American Jews.

In this way, although our joy is tempered and muted, we can nonetheless celebrate Sukkot knowing that we are not alone, that a path has been illuminated for us, and that in this time of national despair, we are memorializing those taken from us by raising up a beacon of hope for all Americans.



For Young People: Like the Wings of a Dove?

The Hebrew name for the dove is *yonah* (יֹנָת). It's believed that the Hebrew name comes either from the word *yanah*, which means to oppress, or from the word *anah*, which means to mourn.

The Book of Genesis (8:8-12) in the Bible tells how Noah sent out a dove from the ark to see if the waters of the flood had gone down. Noah knew that the dove could be counted on to return, just as we know that a dove's larger carrier-pigeon

cousin can be relied on to carry messages faithfully over long distances. Noah's dove, however, did not carry a message written by a human hand, as a carrier pigeon does, but chose by itself to return to Noah with a freshly torn olive leaf, which told Noah that the waters had really receded.



There's another reason why Noah may have chosen to send the dove. In that part of the Bible called the Book of Psalms—a psalm is a holy song, usually about God—it says (in Psalm 55:7): "Oh, if only I had wings like a dove! Then I would fly away and be at rest."

How is it possible to both fly and be at rest at the same time? Our rabbis long ago taught that all the other birds rest on a rock or tree when tired, but the dove draws in one of its wings and flies on with the other. (Genesis Rabbah 39:8)

The dove is one of the least combative birds. When attacked by other birds, it never fights back. In a way suggested by the dove's behavior, we are taught that it is better to be among the people who are *persecuted* than to be among the *persecutors*—it is better to have evil done to us than to do evil to others.

But we are not birds or doves, of course, so sometimes when attacked or when we see others attacked, we know that the Torah teaches us it's a mitzvah to fight back. It's like when a bully picks on someone who can't fight back, we should help. But, of course, when that happens we just want to stop the bully—we don't want to become bullies ourselves.

It's time for the dove quiz! 1. In what unusual place do some doves in Israel build their nests? 2. How small is the smallest dove? 3. How large is the largest dove? 4. What do doves eat?

There was a man in ancient Israel whose name was Elisha but who was called "the

man of wings." The Romans were ruling Israel at the time and Elisha broke their law by praying with *tefillin* (which are small boxes, containing verses from the Torah, which are strapped to the arm and head when praying as a reminder of the Torah's teachings). When spotted by a Roman official, Elisha took off his tefillin, held them in his hand, and tried to run away. Then, when he was caught and asked what he had in his hands, he answered, "The wings of a dove"—which some say miraculously appeared in his hands.

The Rabbis have asked, Why did he say the wings of a dove? And they have answered: the Jewish people is like a dove: as a dove is protected by its wings, so is Israel protected by the teachings of the Torah. (Shabbat 49a and 130a)

How does the Torah protect us? We are taught not to fight simply because we're angry, which is wrong and would get us into trouble in more ways than one. We know *when* and *how* to fight because the Torah teaches us that at certain times and in certain ways, it's the right thing to do.

(Answers to the dove quiz: 1. In the cracks and crevices of rocks where they are protected. 2. About six to eight inches long. 3. About 12 inches long. 4. Seeds, nuts, fruits, and insects.)

OPENINGS

Published by
Kehillat Kharakim

630 Hauser Blvd., #205
Los Angeles, CA 90036
(323) 934-2925/934-2913 (fax)

Rabbi Team

Rabbi Moshe ben Asher
Khulda bat Sarah

© 2001/5762 Khevera shel Kharakim

על קהלת חרקים—ABOUT KEHILLAT KHARAKIM

- Kehillat Kharakim—a community of *openings*—meets twice-monthly for Shabbat services.
 - Kehillat Kharakim Friday-evening services regularly include a devar Torah (“sermon”) in the form of a readers’ theatre Torah-drama.
 - Kehillat Kharakim’s formation is being sponsored by Gather the People (GTP), a nonprofit organization founded by a Sponsor Committee of rabbis from virtually all the major branches and movements of Judaism.
 - Kehillat Kharakim’s rabbinic leadership is provided by Rabbi Moshe ben Asher and Khulda bat Sarah, formerly the “Rabbi Team” for Congregation Beth Israel of Chico, California.
 - The Kehillat Kharakim vision is to create a community of *openings*, or “kharakim,” through which family members of all ages can draw upon Judaism and congregational life to increase meaning and fulfillment in their own lives.
- The goal is a community that, regardless of where one begins or ends in Jewish knowledge or commitment, encourages greater exploration, acquisition, and expression of Judaism—and regardless of where one fits religiously, treats each person with kindness and respect.
 - The Kehillat Kharakim vision is that, apart from our capacity as individuals, we also have a role as a kehillah, a *community*. Following the example of Nehemiah, who gathered the people to rebuild the wall and gates of Jerusalem, we assume that we too can reduce the pressures and realize the hopes that will uplift our families. By doing mitzvot *collectively*, we can bring about change for the good in our day to day lives.
 - Kehillat Kharakim is independent, not affiliated with any of the movements or branches of Judaism.
 - Kehillat Kharakim has the following kashrut policy: all food must be dairy or parve, unless special arrangements have been made, and must be prepared according to kosher guidelines; packaged goods must be certified as kosher; fresh baked goods must be purchased from kosher bakeries; and home-baked goods must contain only vegetable shortening. Non-kosher food shall not be served.

Kehillat Kharakim is a project of
Gather the People
A Nonprofit Education & Training Resource
for Congregational Community Development
<http://www.gatherthepeople.org>

PASTORAL COUNSELING AVAILABLE

Rabbi Moshe offers pastoral counseling without charge to any Kehillat Kharakim individual, couple, or family. Pastoral counseling addresses religious and spiritual as well as psychological and emotional needs. Moshe has a Ph.D. in Social Work, was a staff member of the Adirondack Samaritan Counseling Center of Glens Falls, NY, and was trained at the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Los Angeles. Call (323) 934-2925 for more information or an appointment.

TAX DEDUCTIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUPPORT KEHILLAT KHARAKIM SHOULD BE MADE TO “GATHER THE PEOPLE”

KEHILLAT KHARAKIM
630 Hauser Blvd., #205
Los Angeles, CA 90036

