SUKKOT SHABBOS
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Give Peace a Chance

Given the news that has come out of Israel, I'm sorry I have to begin by telling you of people I feel sorry for. Their names are Dave and London and Feivish and Harry and Giddeon and many more who I don't know and have never met. So, who are they? They are letter writers to Arutz Sheva. Arutz Sheva operates three websites with news and content. It describes itself as being "the largest and leading news site for the religious public, providing news via journalists in Israel and abroad 24 hours a day." On Wednesday evening, as soon as Yom Tov was over, I turned on my IPad to see what was happening in Israel. For some reason, the first website I opened was Arutz Sheva. In the feature article announcing the first stage of the agreement between Israel and Hamas, there was a whole list of letter writers, some of whose names I just mentioned. Each and every letter writer denounced the agreement. Some of their words:
- "Where is the opposition within Likud and the broader coalition?"
- "Hamas said "no deal" so what is Trump announcement?"
- "The countdown to the next war has officially begun."
- "Donald Trump today is delusional."
- "Trump knows Hamas won't cave but Israel will, so he simply changed the deal to pressure Israel. Horrible for Israel."
- "Technically, tactically and strategically this is a surrender."

On and on … not a good word to say, not a glimmer of hope. But isn't the name of Israel's national anthem "Hatikvah – the hope?" Is there no reason to hope? No! Not that this is the end of the conflict, but maybe, just maybe the beginning of the end. Much more Jewish was AIPAC's approach when it wrote: "This is an extraordinary moment for America, Israel and the world. We join the people of Israel in celebrating this breakthrough."

And if you wonder how can there be hope for peace with a people who seem to so hate us, who at the drop of a hat try to kill us, who are so resentful of us, so envious of us, so separated from us – religiously and economically – how can there ever be a true peace with such people? The answer can be found in a lesson that comes from the Succah.

There is a blessing we Jews recite every Friday night. It reads as follows: "*Boruch attah Hashem ha-poras succat shalom oleinu v'al kol amo Yisroel v'al Yerushalayim* – Blessed art You O Lord who spreads the Succah of peace upon us, upon all of His people Israel and upon Jerusalem." The question must be asked: What's the connection between Succah and peace? Why does it say that God should spread the succah of peace? Why not spread over us the matzo of peace, or the tefillin of peace? Or the tallis of peace? What connects the succah and peace?

Several answers are given to this question. But the most relevant one is from Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Palestine. Rabbi Kook explains the connection between the succah and peace in the following way. He says you can fulfill the mitzvah of succah with an imperfect succah. You are supposed to have four walls . . . but if for some reason you only have two walls and a piece of a third, it is still kosher. You are supposed to have a beautifully decorated succah, but if it has no decorations at all, it is still kosher. A succah that is imperfect is still a kosher succah. With most every other mitzvah, we strive for perfection. At the Shabbos table we don't say a motzi over a broken loaf. An esrog which is missing a piece is not a kosher one. A strapless tefillin cannot be worn. It is only in the succah that the Lord tolerates imperfection. And this is why, says Rav Kook, we connect the succah with peace. Because peace can never exist if we insist on perfection. In the grave there is perfect peace, but in this world there is a big shortage of perfect people and therefore we can only get along if we are willing to sit in the same succah, despite *its* imperfections, and despite *our* imperfections.

Peace requires accepting that the other side is far from perfect. The word for domestic tranquility in Hebrew is "*Shalom bayit*." A house can only have peace if everyone living within it accepts the fact that everyone living under that roof is not perfect. Similarly, peace between countries and people can only come about with the realization that the peace is going to be with imperfect partners, at best. That one must be prepared to settle for an imperfect peace. Israel does not have a perfect peace with Egypt. Israelis visit Egypt but Egyptians do not visit Israel. The media in Egypt is still filled with anti-Semitic caricatures. Egypt's President refuses to set foot into Israel. But as most all of our grandmother's used to put it: "*besser ah shlechten sholom vi ah gutten krig* . . . better a bad peace than a good war." With all the hostility in the region, the border with Egypt is a peaceful one. Yes, it's an imperfect peace, but it is a peace nonetheless.

And that, I trust, will someday be the case between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The conflict runs deep and it's not going to be settled by an overnight summit. There's a long road ahead. These two peoples are going to have to figure out how they are going to live with each other. For what is the choice? It's not an easy road to travel – the road to peace. Perhaps that is why when we say the prayer: "*Oseh shalom bimramov* – may He who makes peace in the Heavens above make peace for us and for all Israel" . . . when we say this beautiful prayer for peace, we take three steps backward and three steps forward. For that's the way it is on the path to peace.

So let us rejoice on this Sukkot. Let us rejoice with the realization that while peace is not at hand, please God, peace is inevitable. It may not be a perfect one but the succah reminds us that that's okay.

And I would tell you why we still do have reason to hope. I, for one, do not believe there will never be peace amongst these people. I don't accept that way of thinking:

- If North Koreans and South Koreans, who are divided by the most highly armed and explosive military zone in the world, can learn to live next to each other . . . so can the Arabs and Israelis.

- If the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, after hundreds of years of ethnic warfare, can negotiate a reasonable peace deal that is accepted by all . . . the Arabs and Israelis can do the same.

- If one of America's largest trading partners is Japan, and if today citizens of France and citizens of Germany can cross each other's border without showing a passport . . . if Germany is one of Israel's strongest supporters . . . then anything is possible for Israel and the Arab countries.

- Indeed, in our own country, if today the mayors and police chiefs in southern cities are black men… . then certainly we can have reason to hope for peace some day in the Middle East.

And let me conclude by giving you just one more reason for rejoicing on this holiday. It comes from one of the stories that Elie Wiesel describes having taken place in the concentration camps. Let me tell it to you in his words:

"In one of the barracks, several hundred Jews gathered to celebrate Simhat-Torah. In the shadow of shadows? Yes, even there. On the threshold of the death chambers? Yes, even there. But there was no Sefer Torah. So how could they organize the ritual Hakafot, the traditional procession with the sacred scrolls? As they were trying to solve the problem, an old man – old? – the word had no meaning there – an old man noticed a young boy who was so old, so old, standing there looking on and dreaming. "Do you remember what you learned?" asked the old man. "Yes, I do," replied the young boy. "Really," said the old man, "you must remember Shma Yisrael?" "I remember much more," said the young boy. "ShmaYisrael is enough," said the old man. And he lifted the boy from the ground and began dancing with him – as though *he* were the Torah. And all joined in, they all sang and danced and cried. They cried but they sang with fervor – never before had Jews celebrated Simhat Torah with such fervor."

Let us rejoice on this Sukkot that we are a people who do not teach our children to throw stones and molotov cocktails. We are not a people who would put our children's lives in the line of fire. We are a people who, down through the centuries, taught our children "*nit mit die hent*," don't hit with your hands. We would never allow Jewish children to celebrate with blood soaked hands. Never! Let us rejoice that we are a people who at all times, under all circumstances, treat our children as being as holy as a Torah scroll. We are a people who dance with our children. In this spirit, let us rejoice on this Sukkot in the hope that our prayer linking the succah and peace will soon be fulfilled. That the Lord will "spread the shelter of peace upon us, upon all of His people Israel and upon Jerusalem." Amen.

Sermons/Sukkot2025 Give Peace a Chance
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