

Shabbat Veitchanan

August 1, 2009

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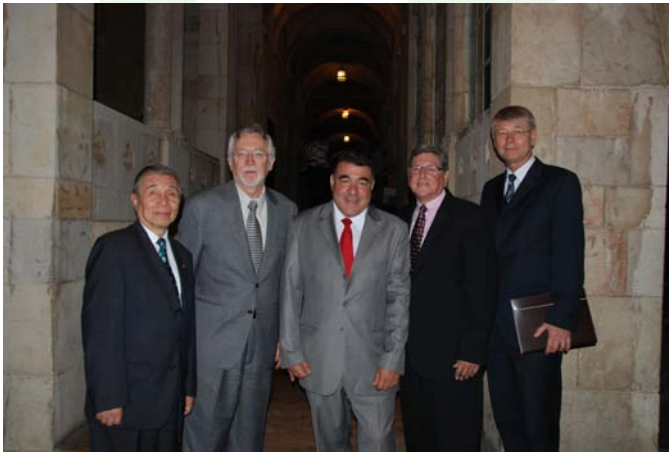
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News

The Seventh-day Adventists in Israel had their spiritual assembly on Shabbat July 25 in Jerusalem. More than 600 people enjoyed the program we presented throughout the day. We were a little worried about the Festival we were going to present on Sunday, but it was a real success with about 300 attending.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FESTIVAL



The International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) in Israel organized the first Festival of Religious Freedom on Sunday July 26, 2009 in the YMCA auditorium in Jerusalem. This Festival was a real success in the significant and symbolic city of Jerusalem. The IRLA was created in Israel in 1998, when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights in Israel. Our organization wants to promote, to defend and to protect Religious Liberty in Israel. In fact Israel is not a bad country for religious liberty; we have freedom of worship, we can run our organization freely, and we can hold all kinds of meetings freely. It is surprising that Jews have fewer rights than Christians in Israel. Among the speakers was Rabbi Ya'acov Lebeau, Director of the United Synagogues of Conservative Judaism in Israel. He told us that in Israel there is a monopoly on Judaism which is held by the Orthodox community. When he, as a Rabbi, marries a Jewish couple, the marriage is not recognized by the Ministry of the Interior because

he is a Conservative, not an Orthodox rabbi. However, as a community of believers in Yeshua organized as Adventists, we have all the rights to marry our people and the marriage is recognized officially.

The speakers at this Festival of Religious Freedom were: (in the pictures and from left to right)

- Dr Eugene Hsu King-Yi, Vice-President of the IRLA, based in Washington DC, Expert in Religious Liberty in China.

- Dr John Graz, General Secretary of the International Religious Liberty Association, based in Washington DC, Director of the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department.

- Pastor Richard Elofer, President of the Israeli IRLA based in Jerusalem, in Hebrew, Haamutah Habenleumit Lechirut Hadat BeIsrael, and President of the Seventh-day Adventists in Israel.

- Rabbi Ya'acov Lebeau, Director of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center.

- Pastor Harald Wollan, General Secretary of the European office of the IRLA, based in London, England, and Executive Secretary of the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventists.

A good number of people came to this Festival about 300 attending with about half of them non-Adventists. Some people came to me at the end of the meeting to thank me for what they saw. They said that they had come, even though they did not know what the meeting would be. They had only heard or read about it in the newspapers. They enjoyed the program presented which included songs, music, and speeches.

Three journalists from the Jerusalem Post attended the Festival, two from the English edition of the newspaper and one from the French edition. The French edition has already published their report. I bought this newspaper today and you can read it on their website edition. <http://fr.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1248277910422&pagename=JFrench%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>. The title of their report is significant: "Religions, Feasts and Success".

A report has been published by the Adventist News Network website: <http://news.adventist.org/2009/07/first-religious-libe.html>.

OVERVIEW



DEVARIM

DEUTERONOMY 3:23-7:11

Although Moshe is happy that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special mitzvot.

Hashem refuses.

Moshe reminds Bnei Yisrael of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on Bnei Yisrael that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation.

Moshe specifically enjoins Bnei Yisrael to “pass over” the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when Bnei Yisrael dwell in Eretz Yisrael they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three “refuge cities” to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the 10 Commandments and then teaches the Shema, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d.

Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation.

The parasha ends with Moshe exhorting Bnei Yisrael not to intermarry when they enter Eretz Yisrael, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

515 PRAYERS

Moshe wanted to enter the land of Israel, but the Almighty did not allow him to enter. The Torah states that Moshe said: **“And I prayed to the Almighty at that time saying...”** (Deut. 3:23)

One of the ways of understanding the Torah is through gematria—examining the numerical values

of the words. What do we learn from the numerical value (515) of the first word of the verse, “*Va’etchanan*” (“and I prayed”)?

The Sages tell us that Moshe prayed to the Almighty as many prayers as the numerical value of the *va’etchanan*—515 prayers. This shows us how strong Moshe’s desire was to enter the Holy Land.

Let’s picture this: If someone asks another person for something and the other person refuses to meet his request, it is possible that he will ask again. However, after a few times, he will give up. There is a limit to how many times one person will ask another for something. Here we see that Moshe continued to ask five hundred and fifteen times. This is truly amazing. We learn from this the principle that the way to success is through persistence. Especially in spiritual matters one needs to adopt this attitude.

Rabbi Pakouz says that there are three rules for success: (1) Initiative, you have to try, (2) Perseverance, you have to keep trying, and (3) The Almighty blesses your efforts. Young children are the paradigm of persistence. (Ask any parent!)

If something is important enough to you, you must persist to succeed.

G-D’S COMMANDMENTS ARE LIFE

This week’s Parasha *Va’etchanan* is the second Parasha in the Book of Devarim. The Book of Devarim was said by Moshe to the second generation—to the children of those who came out of Egypt. They didn’t experience the Exodus, nor did they witness the splitting of the sea or the giving of the Torah. They didn’t see the many miracles that G-d performed for their parents. They also didn’t experience the punishments that their parents suffered for the sins committed during the forty years in the desert, such as the worshipping of the Golden Calf, etc.

To this generation, which would soon enter the Promised Land, Moshe spells out the rewards and punishments for obeying or disobeying G-d’s commandments. Moshe stresses that if they want to live safely and securely in the Promised Land, they must adhere to G-d’s commandments.

Moshe says, **“And now Israel, listen to the statutes and the ordinances which I teach you to do them, so that you may live, and go in and possess the land which**

the L-rd, the G-d of your fathers gives to you... For all the men who followed the [idol] Baal-peor, the L-rd your G-d has destroyed them from your midst. But you that did connect to the L-rd your G-d are alive every one of you today.” (Deut. 4:1-4)

SHABBAT NACHMU

This Shabbat, the first Shabbat after Tisha B’Av, is called, “Shabbat Nachmu” (“Shabbat of comfort”), as the Haftarah of this week begins with the words “*Nachmu Nachmu Ami*”—“Comfort, Comfort, my people.” (Is. 40:1)

There are seven weeks from Tisha B’Av until Rosh Hashana. This period is called, “*Shiva D’nechemta*”—“Seven weeks of comfort.” These seven Haftarot are prophesies of comfort and hope for the Jewish people.

SHEMA ISRAEL

In this week’s Parasha we find the “Sh’ema Israel”—“Hear O’ Israel the L-rd is Our G-d the L-rd is One. And you shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might *Béchol Méodecha*” (Deut. 6:4-5) The Sh’ema Israel prayer is recited three times daily as we affirm our belief in G-d and our love for Him.

The words *Bechol Meodecha*—“with all your might” can also be translated, “with every measure.” Meaning, that even if G-d acts with us in a measure that may not seem good, we must love Him just the same. Our sages say that, “One must bless G-d for the bad just as for the good!” For, no matter whether experiencing good and happiness which shows G-d’s kindness in a revealing way or when one, G-d forbid, experiences suffering, one’s love for G-d must not waiver. Our sages explain that although we may not see the good in certain situations, it is only because we have limited vision. From G-d’s perspective there is a reason for everything. At the end, whatever G-d does is for the good.

MEZUZAH

Amongst the many mitzvot in this week’s Parsha, *Va’etchanan*, we read about the mitzvah of Mezuzah.

“Hear O Israel The L-rd is our G-d, The L-rd is One. And you shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your might. And these words [the Torah] which I command you this day,

shall be upon your heart... And you shall write them upon the posts of your house and your gates (Deut. 6:4-9).”

The *Mezuzah*, which must be affixed to each door post (except bathrooms etc.) of a Jewish home, consists of two passages of the Torah written on parchment, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21.

The *Mezuzah* is not the casing, but the written parchment inside the casing. Unfortunately, many people will buy an expensive case, but overlook the fact that the actual *Mezuzah*-insert may not be kosher.

In Psalms King David says, “G-d shall protect your exit and your entry from now and forever.” Our sages say that this applies to the *Mezuzah*. It acts as a shield and protects us, not only when we are inside the home but also when we go out.

Most of the time the letter “*Shin*” is written on the outside of the Mezuzah cover “*Shin*” stands for G-d’s name “*Shadiy*”. It is spelled; shin, daled, yud. These three letters serves as an acronym for the words, “*Shomer Daltei Yisrael*”—“G-d watches over the doors of Israel.”

LOVE YOUR G-D

The Torah states, “And you shall love the L-rd your G-d...” (Dev. 6:5) How does one command love? We may think that regarding love, you either have it, or you don’t. That, however, must not be correct—for if it were, it couldn’t be a Commandment. We must have tools in hand that help us to develop this love.

The Rambam (Maimonides) list all of the Commandments, and approach this one in much the same way. They quote the Midrash, which reads as follows: “When the Torah says ‘And you shall love the L-rd your G-d’, I do not know how one is to love the Supreme Being. Thus the Torah says ‘And these words, which I command you this day, shall be upon your hearts...’ [v. 6], because from this a person will come to recognize He Who spoke and created the world.” The Sefer HaChinuch explains: By concentrating upon Torah, love for G-d will come naturally into your heart. How? If we think about His actions and His ways, we will come to recognize him according to our abilities, and that recognition will afford us great enjoyment.

2 HOUSES OR 2 CHICKENS

The Talmudic sages say that even a poor person who receives charity should also perform acts of charity. Charity is much more beneficial to the one who gives than to the one who receives.

Two Russian peasants were sitting and discussing their loyalty to the Czar. Said one of them: "My loyalty to the Czar has no bounds."

"What if you owned two houses, would you give one to the Czar?" Pondered his friend.

"Sure I would," replied the first without hesitation. "What if you owned two cows, would you give one to the Czar?" Again his friend replied in the affirmative. "What if you had two chickens, would you give up one for the Czar?"

"This I couldn't do!" replied the first peasant.

"But why is a chicken different than a house and a cow?" "There is a big difference... two chickens I do happen to own!"

May our acts of goodness and kindness toward each other merit the ultimate redemption and the coming of the Mashiach. This will bring the greatest comfort ("Menachem Av") to us as well as to our Father in Heaven.

RABBI AKIVA LAUGHS

Once Rabbi Gamliel, Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiva were traveling to Rome. From a distance, they heard the noise of the city. Three of the Rabbis began to weep, while Rabbi Akiva laughed. "Why are you laughing?" they asked.

"Why are you crying?" Rabbi Akiva responded.

"These people destroyed our Holy Temple and worship idols. Yet they are living peacefully, while our Holy Temple, the House of G-d, lies in ashes.

How can we not cry?"

"That is exactly the reason I am laughing," answered Rabbi Akiva. "If people who transgressed G-d's will receive such goodness, imagine how much more good will G-d give those who obey Him and fulfill His Torah and mitzvot!"

RABBI AKIVA LAUGHS 2

On another occasion, the four rabbis were walking to Jerusalem. Upon reaching Mount Tzofim, they saw the site of the

destroyed Holy Temple from the distance. At that point, they tore their clothes in mourning, as Jewish law dictates. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox roaming where the Temple once stood.

Three of the rabbis began to weep, while Rabbi Akiva laughed. "Why are you laughing?" they protested.

"Why are you crying?" Rabbi Akiva replied.

"We see the most holy spot of the Beth Hamikdash, where at one time no one except the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) could enter, and then only on Yom Kippur, now foxes are roaming there! How can we not cry?"

Rabbi Akiva answered, "This is the reason I am laughing! When I see that the prophecies of destruction were fulfilled to the fullest, I am encouraged and confident that the prophecies such as, 'There will come a time when old men and women will sit peacefully in the streets of Jerusalem' - which state that good times will come, will surely be fulfilled and come true."

The other rabbis said to Rabbi Akiva, "Akiva you have comforted us! Akiva you have comforted us!"

MEZZUZA'S PARCHMENT

The Talmud tells the following wonderful story: A special friendship existed between King Antoninus and Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi (known as Rebbi). Once King Antoninus sent Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi a precious stone as a gift. In return Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi sent him a Mezuzah.

Antoninus was puzzled: "I sent you such an expensive gift and you send me a piece of parchment?"

Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi replied, "Your gift I will always have to guard to make sure that no one steals it. But my gift to you, the Mezuzah, will watch over you and protect you at all times!"

EDITOR

A newsletter published by the
World Jewish Adventist Friendship Center
Under the umbrella of the
General Conference — Global Mission Office

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HAFTARA

Isaiah 40:1-20

This Shabbat is the first Shabbat after Tisha B'Av. It is called, "Shabbat Nachmu" ("Shabbat of comfort"), as the Haftarah of this week begins with the words "**Nachmu Nachmu Ami**" - "**Comfort, comfort, my people.**" There are seven weeks from Tisha B'Av until Rosh Hashana. This period is called, "Shiva D'nechemta"—"Seven weeks of comfort." These seven Haftarot are prophesies of comfort and hope for Israel and God's people at large.

Haftara: The root of the Hebrew word for comfort "**Nachem**", **nun-chet-mem** can refer to comforting the nation as well as to comforting an individual after the death of a loved one.

If the people of Israel are to be comforted, it is because the Lord is coming very soon. The text says, A voice rings out: "**Clear in the desert a road for the LORD! Level in the wilderness a highway for our God! Let every valley be raised, every hill and mount made low. Let the rugged ground become level and the ridges become a plain. The Presence of the LORD shall appear, and all flesh, as one, shall behold — For the LORD Himself has spoken**" (Is. 40:3-5 JPS).

It is interesting to notice that the Brit Hachadasha, which is an interpretation made 2000 years ago applied this text to the coming of the Mashiach. "**This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight''**" (Matt. 3:3). Matatyahu spoke about Yochanan HaMatbil who prepared the way of Yeshua in the desert near Jericho. What is interesting is that the brit Hachadasha did not apply **verse 5, 'The Presence of the LORD shall appear, And all flesh, as one, shall behold,'** (JPS) to Yochanan because this part of the verse will be applicable only at the end of time for the definitive presence or coming of the Mashiach, what we call the Second Coming of the Mashiach. Then all flesh (from everywhere in the world) shall behold.

Then we will see the real comfort and consolation of Israel. As it is written, "**That her iniquity is expiated; for she has received at the hand of the LORD double for all her sins**" (Is. 40:2). They have been pardoned for all their sins and they will enjoy eternal rest. Our mission today is to comfort Israel and to prepare Jerusalem for that great day, "**Nachmu Nachmu Ami**" - "**Comfort, comfort, my people.**" (Isaie 40:1)

BESORAT YESHUA

Mark 6:41-52

As I wrote in the Haftara text, we are in a special period called "Shabbat Nachmu - Shabbat of Comfort". This week the Brit Hachadasha text is about comfort, the comfort of the Mashiach who came as "**the consolation of Israel**" (Luke 2:25).

BESORAH: In our text of the Besorah, Yeshua not only taught the crowds and worked as a prophet, but he comforted the people by providing food. "**Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all**" (Mark 6:41). Yeshua is the new Moses, the one who was announced by Moses. Exactly as Moses gave bread from heaven, Yeshua also gave bread, but in addition to bread, Yeshua also shared fish among all these people who numbered about 5,000 people. They were all filled which means there was more food than was needed, and the rest, twelve baskets full which could be used later, was collected. This number is a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel who were fed by Moses and G-d and also to the twelve talmidim of Yeshua who also were fed and became instruments of G-d for giving more spiritual food to the people of Israel. We remember that Moses said, "**In order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that the LORD decrees**" (Deut 8:3 JPS). Yeshua did one more thing; he saw the condition of his talmidim. Working days and nights with the Mashiach, they were tired from all the work, that is why Yeshua wanted to comfort them, "**Nachmu Nachmu Ami**". "**Immediately, He made his disciples get into the boat and go...**" (Mark 6:46). Yeshua cares for his people; he comforts and helps them to get rest. Only after all this work did he decide to have a close relationship with our father in heaven, His Father. "**After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray**" (47). The disciples did not get rest though; they were on the sea and once again Yeshua went to comfort them. (cf. 47-52)

