

## THE FRUITS OF UNITY

As one year draws to a close and a new one is about to begin,  
I bring you greetings from the Holy Land -- the land about which it is  
written (Deut. 11:12) בְּרִיָּה לְיָמֵינוּ וּלְיָמֵי הַבָּאִים

written (Deut. 11:12) ארץ אשר ה' אלוהיך בורש אוהב,  
אמנו עני ה' אלוהיך בה אכאשית בשנה וצא אחרית  
שנה

-- a land which the Lord thy God cares about; constantly are the eyes of the Lord thy God upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

It is a beautiful, exciting, lovely, inspiring -- and holy land, even in times of crisis. I tell this to you not to convey information which you did not know before, but rather as a way of mutually affirming love and affection for this land of ours.

The temper of Israelis has undergone a rather serious change as a result of recent events. Most of them are upset, angry, and disappointed in the United States Government. It is true that governments can change their minds, especially on the basis of their own national interest. Sometimes they can even be fickle. But the shocking action of the American Government towards Israel is simply inexcusable. The guarantees that America gave Israel concerning the cease-fire were merely the first of a long list of guarantees in a yet-secret letter that Pres. Nixon sent to Mrs. Meir. When the United States failed to honor those initial commitments, and when, in addition, the State and Defense Departments ridiculed Israel, Israel refused to go any further in what

seemed to be an international farce. Unquestionably, many of the practical details will be ironed out in the summit meeting that is taking place now between the leaders of both governments in Washington. But the psychological consequences of this betrayal will take much, much longer to heal. Israelis have lost respect for the United States, and that cannot be disposed of in fifteen minutes or even fifteen days.

Israelis high and low are not panicking, as Diaspora Jews sometimes tend to do. They are also not as supremely confident as they often seemed to be. The missile threat is a very, very real one, and more jets are not an adequate answer to SAM 2's and SAM 3's.

But the most significant fact to emerge from all this, one that has political as well as psychological and religious significance, is that -- other than divine help -- Israel knows that in the crunch, in the moment of high crisis, they cannot rely on the United States; they certainly cannot rely upon the United Nations, which most Israelis consider an international joke. They can only rely upon world Jewry, and especially American Jewry.

Not once have I found the least complaint against American Jews, something which was rather common before 1967. There is, however, real concern as to whether or not American Jews will be able to stand up under the pressure that they expect soon to be exerted against American Jewry in this country.

Permit me to express my theme by means of a parable, taken from a halakhah in the Mishnah, relevant to this week's reading.

Our Sidra opens with the law of the bikkurim, the first fruits that the farmer of old was commanded to bring to the Temple. The Mishnah (Bikkurim 1:1) tells us that there are times that a man is required to, and times that he is not required to, offer the first fruits in the Temple. The Mishnah discusses specifically the following case: one who plants a tree and then takes a branch or shoot of that tree and bends it over into the ground, so that it begins to sprout and form a new trunk. What is the law concerning bikkurim from that new trunk? We are told, that if the ground in which the original trunk and the soil in which the new trunk are growing do not belong to the same individual, then one may not bring such fruit as bikkurim. The first fruit must come from a tree which belongs completely to one individual. Now, the question is אם אדם יושב על שני חלקי ארץ, ונטיח ענף מן העץ שבארץ אחת אל הארץ השנייה, אם הוא יכול להביא פירות כבבכורים?, if one owns both the ground in which the original trunk is planted, and the ground into which the branch has been inserted. Here, normally, one is required to bring the bikkurim, because both sources of nourishment belong completely to one individual. However, the Mishnah states that if underneath the curved branch, bending from the original trunk to the point of contact with the new soil, there was a path, whether a private path or a public thoroughfare, אם היה שם דרך בין שני חלקי הארץ, הרי זה כדרכי העיר, ואין להביא פירות כבבכורים., then that acts as a source of discontinuity, and although one individual owns both plots of ground, he cannot bring these fruits as bikkurim.

If one allows a discontinuity to breach the relationship between trunk and branch, he may have fruit, but the Halakhah does not consider

him fruitful. In order to bring the first fruit and qualify for the House of God, there must be no interruption, no rupture, between root and branch.

I take this to be a parable for the Jewish world today. Israel and the Diaspora live in a marvelous, symbiotic, mutual relationship. We American Jews send branches of our economy and culture to the land of Israel; and from Israel there are shoots that are sent here to America to enrich our lives. Together we are bearing fruit, bikkurim, for all of Jewish history and perpetuity. Despite the geographical distance, we do and must act as one.

But there is always the danger that an interruption will come to break the unity and solidarity of the House of Israel. And this threat comes in two forms -- derekh yahid, the private path, and derekh rabbim, the public thoroughfare. By derekh yahid I understand the inner divisions, the splits within the family of Israel itself. Derekh rabbim I take to mean the efforts by peoples and governments outside the House of Israel to pull us apart.

The divisiveness of derekh yahid results from religious differences, economic inhibitions, racial problems, and above all, personal indolence and indifference.

Derekh rabbim implies political and social pressures against American Jews in this country, pressures motivated by a desire to isolate the State of Israel even from the largest Jewish community in the world, that of the United States.

Now, that may seem remote to us today, especially in light of the incipient euphoria that seems to be issuing as a result of the meeting of Mr. Nixon and Mrs. Meir. But if history teaches us anything, it is that nothing is certain. The position of Jews in the United States may, Heaven forbid, become difficult because of our fraternal feelings for the State of Israel. The extreme Right, although they now smile at us because of Israel's anti-Soviet and anti-Communist stance, has never and will never forgive us simply for our differentness; we are an alien element that is unassimilable to the totalitarian mind. This congregation does not have to be reminded about the viciousness and the venom of the New Left, and Old Left, together. And now, even though Liberals like Sen. Fulbright for the first time publicly announce that they understand and accept the sympathy of American Jews for Israel, anyone who reads between the lines will understand that although the good Senator has given us his "hekhsher" for our feelings of solidarity with Israel, he regards it only as "kosher," not as "glatt kosher"... Intellectuals with whom I have met in Israel are worried about the condition of American Jewry when, as they expect on the basis of historical performances, the country will undergo a swing to the Right and blame Jews for the excesses of the New Left because of the preponderance of Jews in the radical and revolutionary fringes.

But whether disruption is threatened by derekh yahid or derekh rabbim, by divisiveness from within or from without, we must resolve that we will permit no break to appear. The fruits of unity will be

our bikkurim, and never must we permit anything to come between the branch and the foot.

Israel will not be defeated, <sup>''</sup>ן , by Arabs or Russians or terrorists, not by missiles or hijackers or cholera. These may hurt, but we shall survive them. We will be endangered if we will allow either a derekh yahid or a derekh rabbim to come be'emtza. Now we must prepare for the difficult road ahead.

This congregation knows that I have not spared any criticism of Israel's Government and society when I thought that it was necessary. I have refused to accede to the feelings of many dear friends that all criticism of Israel is taboo. But, this holds true only for family discussions." In a family, if you love your relative, you speak up and speak your mind. But when it comes to our position vis-a-vis the rest of the world, when we touch the fundamentals of Jewish existence and Israel's survival, then there is no question: unity above all else!

Foresight requires us to prepare now to eliminate the sources of future friction and divisiveness within the State and within the people as a whole. We must now begin to worry about the derekh yahid. Much as we dislike admitting it in public, there is an incipient problem of discrimination against Oriental Jews in Israel. Most Oriental Jews come from culturally, economically, and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. But Israel, and we as well, must not permit such a condition to continue.

We must now begin to be worried and act constructively about



the religious problem in Israel, one which will no doubt make itself brutally felt when peace comes to the Near East. It is not at all an easy problem. The religious question cannot be solved in one month or four months, in one year or even five years. But we must begin to build bridges right now between the various segments of our people, religious and so-called non-religious.

Sometimes cynics question whether that can be done at all. I believe that it can. The clear symbol of the feasibility of a solution is the Western Wall. Next time you are in Israel ponder that marvel: under the shadow of the Wall, Jews of all kinds and all varieties, who normally would have nothing to do with each other, and might even be hostile to each other, live in peace and coexist in serenity. Under the shadow of the Wall, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, black and white, Jews of all religious persuasions, mingle freely and happily.

The greatest and most important source of unification and integration in the State of Israel is the Army, which is much more than the military branch of the land, but is also a powerful educational institution and force for social integration.

This past week I had the pleasure of addressing a Nahal group, the para-military branch of the Israel Defense Forces, which undergoes full military training and then settles the border areas. In a visit to one of the largest Nahal training bases in the country, during the evening, I hardly found one person above the age of 25. The spirit was remarkable. Every time one encountered a troupe of girl soldiers they were singing lustily. One sensed that this was not the usual

army base, that here there was a spirit of comraderie that was highly unusual. I spoke, bringing a message of Tōrah to 400 men and women soldiers, who had just finished a 13-hour day of vigorous work, and had from 3-5 hours more to go after the lecture was over. This was a Nahal group that considered itself dati, religious; nevertheless, in this group one saw the forces of unity at work, the marvel of unification in a heterogeneous group. Here in front of me were people who were obviously Ashkenazim, and others even more evidently Sephardim, of all countries and climates. Racially, there were young people with blond hair, and others with black faces. One noticed modern youngsters of the B'nei Akiva mingling freely with Yemenite young people with long peyot and young men obviously from Chabad. And here were some young men without kippot at all -- young people not too observant, but who preferred to mingle with religious people. And above all, what unified them was a remarkable esprit de corps. Despite the usual emotional shyness and lack of sentimentality of the Sabra, one could feel that, with a no-nonsense attitude, our people were being welded into one.

These young people symbolized for me the noteia le-tokh shelo u-mavrikh le-tokh shelo. Each of them came from a different soil, a different background, and yet they were connected to each other, and the continuity permitted no interruption of either derekh yahid or derekh rabbim. These are our bikkurim, our first and finest fruits, the fruits of our national unity.



I cannot conclude this sermon on the solidarity of the Jewish people without many very special mentions of our profound and everlasting identification with our beloved fellow Jews who today are hostages someplace in Jordan, God only knows where. These innocent victims of Arab terrorist savagery are in our hearts and on our minds, causing us anguish and deep pain.

I ask you to join me in the most heartfelt prayers for their survival and their safety. We shall read together the first two and the last two of the Shir Ha-maalot, which speaks specifically of being victimized by deceitful liars, of being held captives by wild desert tribes, of knowing that God will help us as we dwell together, in solidarity.