



SUKKOT

Shabbat Chol Hamoed

70 Bulls: Why Do We Pray for the Nations of the World on Sukkot?

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70 BULLS: WHY DO WE PRAY FOR THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD ON SUKKOT?

ABSTRACT

Let's have a bull shove.

On Sukkot 70 bulls were offered as atonement and protection for the 70 nations of the world, praying for their wellbeing.

Why would we bring offerings and pray for the world's nations in the Holy Temple? Would you do that in your synagogue? Especially considering all the crimes the nations of the world perpetrated against the Jews throughout history – why would we then go ahead and pray for them?!

Can you think of any religion or culture that prays for the welfare of other peoples at their holiest spot?

The 70 bulls of Sukkot reveals and demonstrates a remarkable fact: Judaism is a global force which impacts and influences the entire world.

Sukkot teaches us a big secret: The Holy Temple wasn't just for Jews. It was for the entire world. And by looking at our lives today we can actually see the impact Sukkot has had on the nations of the world over the millennia...

Two incredible stories of Righteous Gentiles who saved Jews during the Holocaust help us understand the power of the 70 bulls.

1. Full of Bull

A devout cattle rancher, a truly religious cowboy, lost his favorite chumash, bible, while mending fences out on the range. This wasn't a simple Torah. The cowboy received this very Five Books of Moses for his Bar Mitzvah. He was devastated at the loss.

Three weeks later, a bull walked up to him carrying the bible in its mouth. The cowboy couldn't believe his eyes. He took the precious book out of the bull's mouth, raised his eyes heavenward and exclaimed the blessing, *Baruch ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech haolam she'asa nissim lavoseinu ba'yamim ha'heim b'zman ha'zeh* – Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

“It’s a miracle! It’s a miracle! It’s a miracle!” shouted the cowboy, over and over again.

“Not really a miracle,” said the bull. “Your name is engraved on the cover.”

2. Seventy Bulls

Let’s talk a little bull, seventy bulls to be exact.

There is something fascinating about Sukkot, which is not appreciated as much as it should be.

During the time of the Holy Temple seventy bulls were offered on Sukkot on behalf of the seventy nations of the world. The Jewish people brought these offerings as atonement and protection of the nations, praying for their wellbeing.¹

Today these offerings are recreated through our prayers. In the daily Sukkot musaf prayers and Torah readings we read the verses in the Torah² that describe these seventy bull offerings corresponding with the seventy nations of the world.

The breakdown of the bull offerings goes like this: On the first day of Sukkot, 13 bulls were offered. 12 bulls on day two. 11 bulls on day three. Each of the next four days the number decreased by one: 10 on day four. 9 on day five. 8 on day 6. And 7 on the seventh and last day of Sukkot.³

Thus, if you do the math: $13+12+11+10+9+8+7=70$

70 bulls offered in the Temple for the 70 nations.

3. Why Are We Praying for the Gentiles?

These offerings and prayers pose an obvious question:

Judaism is seemingly only for Jews. So why are we bringing offerings and praying for the welfare of world’s nations? And of all places, in the Holy Temple? Would you do that in your synagogue?

Especially considering all the crimes the nations of the world perpetrated against the Jews throughout history – why would we then go ahead and pray for them?!

¹ See Sukkah 55b and Rashi. Midrash, Bamidbar Rabba 21:24.

² Numbers 29:13-32.

³ See Ohr Hatorah, Sukkot, p. 1755-1769 for an explanation on these offerings and their descending order.

Can you think of any religion or culture that prays for the welfare of other peoples at their holiest spot?

The answer, my friends, may be surprising to some of you:

The truth is that Judaism is not another parochial religion just for Jews. Judaism is a global force which is meant to impact and influence the entire world.

And this remarkable fact is revealed to us and demonstrated particularly on the holiday of Sukkot, when we offer the seventy bulls and pray for the protection and blessing of the nations of the world.

What is astonishing about this is two things (among many others):

1. Unlike other religions, we pray for all the nations not to proselytize or convert them. Judaism does not seek to convert a non-Jew. Quite the contrary, we dissuade anyone interested in converting. Why? Because G-d created all human beings, and every one as they are, Jew or non-Jew, can and must serve G-d as they are. A non-Jew need not be Jewish to serve G-d. Every one, as they are, has the ability to serve and connect with G-d as they are
2. We pray and bring offerings for all seventy nations, not just for the righteous ones, but also for the ones that have persecuted and exiled us, because we believe that all nations and all people will ultimately come to realize the truth of G-d and His universal Noachide laws of virtue and justice – as the moral blueprint and foundation of all civilization

Not just the Jewish people, but all nations and peoples will serve, praise and laud G-d, as we just read in the Hallel prayers:

*Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal!*⁴

The verse itself uses two different phrases for the world's nations and peoples: *Goyim* (nations) and *umim* (peoples): The former refers to the nations that subjugated the Jews, and the latter refers to the people that did not.⁵ And both categories – “all nations” (*kol goyim*) and “all peoples” (*kol l'umim*) – will laud G-d and recognize His kindness.

And this will come to full fruition in the Messianic age, when the “nations will serve G-d together,” as it states⁶: “I will transform the peoples to a purer language that they all will call upon the name of G-d and serve Him with one purpose.”⁷

⁴ Psalm 117.

⁵ Yalkut Chadash, Pirush HaPsukim, section 541 (cited on Ohr HaTorah Sukkot p. 1755)

⁶ Tzephaniah 3:9.

⁷ Rambam Laws of Kings end of chapter 11.

“In that era, there will be neither famine or war, envy or competition for good will flow in abundance and all the delights will be freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d... as it says⁸: the world will be filled with Divine knowledge as the waters cover the sea.”⁹

4. The Uniqueness and Divinity of Judaism

This alone is an awe-inspiring message that speaks volumes to the divine, eternal and universal nature of Judaism, and of its unwavering hope and confidence in the human race created by G-d.

Not to pull rank or compare, but can you imagine any other religion in the world bringing offerings in its holy sanctuary, on one of its holiest pilgrimage holidays, not for the benefit of the followers of its own religion, but for the benefit of all the other nations and peoples of the world?!

Only in Judaism do you find offerings brought in the Holy Temple, on every day of Sukkot, for the benefit and wellbeing of all nations and peoples of the world, both the benevolent ones and not.

Why? Because the *Beit Hamikdash*, the Holy Temple, is G-d’s home, and G-d creates all human beings, all of creation, and through G-d’s home everything and everyone is blessed.

Indeed, the Midrash intriguingly tells us:

If the nations of the world had known the value of the Temple for them [the seventy Temple offerings on Sukkot protected the seventy nations of the world], they would have surrounded it with fortresses in order to protect it. For it was greater value for them than for Israel...¹⁰

8 Isaiah 11:9.

9 Isaiah 11:9.

10 Bamidbar Rabba 1:3. Tanchuma Bechukotei 2. See Vayikra Rabba 1:11.

5. Jewish Freedom Today

Some of you may be wondering: when will already see the positive impact of our 70 Sukkot bull offerings and prayers on the nations?

The answer is that we are seeing it with our very eyes. In stark contrast to the world of our parents and grandparents, stretching back thousands of years, we Jews live today in total freedom, free to exercise our religion and educate our children as we see fit. Today you can be as Jewish as you wish!

We often take this gift of our free lives for granted, but just consider what our forbearers endured...

What would our grandparents, suffering under the nations of the world – the Nazis, the communists, the pogroms, the Cossacks, the Inquisitions, the Crusaders; who were persecuted by the Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Babylonians, Romans; the list goes on – what would they say about the life of their Jewish children today?!

I am not suggesting that life is perfect and that there is no anti-Semitism, and that we don't have to deal with threats from the Arab world, including Iran. Until Moshiach comes, the nations have not all been transformed. But it is impossible to compare our world today and that of even 80 years ago, let alone centuries ago.

This all did not happen by accident. The world and its nations have become refined due to the millions of good deeds and mitzvahs performed with *mesirat nefesh* (self-sacrifice) over the millennia.

The hundreds of years of offering Sukkot 70 bulls in the Temple, and the thousands of years of our Sukkot prayers reenacting these offerings, for the benefit of the 70 nations – has transformed, and continues to transform, the nations of the world, and prepares them and us for the age when the entire world will be at peace, all united in serving G-d.

6. Righteous Gentiles (Stories – optional)

To support the above, let me share two uplifting stories of gentiles going out of their way to help Jews, demonstrating the impact of the seventy bulls.

For all the horror stories of the holocaust, there are also the inspiring stories of righteous gentiles who sacrificed their lives to save Jews. There are a number of known stories, like Schindler's List and Chiune Sugihara among others, but recently I came across two lesser known episodes.

Israel is well known for being the “start-up nation,” a ridiculously disproportionate number of start-ups and technological inventions in so tiny a country.

One early trailblazer was IBM Israel, which was established in the Technion in 1972, before technology was even a glimmer of what it is today. One of its major players was a gentleman by the name of Zvi Yanai, who went on to become the director general of the Ministry of Science and Technology in Israel.

Yanai was born Sandro Toth. He studied to become a catholic priest. His parents were Yuzzi Galambos, a beautiful Jewish dancer, who in 1930, at 17 years old married 35-year-old Hungarian non-Jewish singer, Kalman Toth. They moved to Italy and had three children: Alessandro-Sandro, his sister, Fiorenza and Lisetta.

After Kalman's untimely death around 1942, Yuzzi, left all alone, struggled to earn a living working as a translator for the Wermacht and giving private lessons in German. She lived with her three children in Tuscany where they had rented a flat in an isolated farmhouse, with no running water. She hired Ida Brunelli (later Lenti), a fifteen year-old young girl as baby sitter to watch her three children. Yuzzi hid her Jewish origin even from the baby-sitter and had the children baptized.

In 1943, the year the Germans occupied Italy, Yuzzi became gravely ill with a heart condition and died of angina pectoris in January 1944. On her deathbed, the mother pleaded with Ida to take care of the orphans, aged 9, 12 and 13. She also revealed to her that they were actually Jewish and gave her the family documents.

Young Ida was faced with terrible challenges, but did not abandon the children and became like a mother to them. The young girl had to shoulder the responsibility of raising three chil-

dren with no economic means whatsoever, all the time keeping the secret about their being Jewish, and facing the terrible danger of discovery by the Germans or the Italian militia.

In desperation, she decided to take them to her mother, Maddalena, who lived in the village of Monselice in Padua province, northern Italy. They were introduced as Hungarian refugees, and no one knew they were Jewish. Ida was unable to provide for the children all by herself, so she turned for help to the mayor. To him she disclosed the children's real identity, and he was prepared to extend his help.

The three children were put in various Christian institutions near Padua. Ida acted as the children's sole guardian; she visited them regularly, and they spent every Sunday with her. Throughout the war period, Ida Brunelli, an inexperienced young girl entrusted with three children, acted with unique maturity. She worked hard on their behalf, keeping in mind their dying mother's last words.

After the war, through the mayor, Ida contacted the Jewish Brigade soldiers who were looking for hidden Jewish orphans throughout Italy. One of the soldiers, Shlomo (Sever) Rovitz, still remembers that day in June 1945, when 18-year-old Ida appeared with three children in the military camp in Santa Colomba, near Siena. She told him that the children were Jewish and described what they had gone through. Rovitz spent some time with the children, verifying Ida's story. He was extremely impressed with Ida's courage and dedication.

Ida was reluctant to leave the children in the camp with the Jewish soldiers. She wanted to make sure they were safely on board the ship leaving from Naples and for a whole month she wandered with the children from camp to camp until she was certain they were in good hands.

In 1950, Ida wrote a letter to the chief rabbi in Rome, telling him her story. The Italian Jewish weekly *Israel* published an article entitled "A Case of Conscience." Ida lived very modestly, married late, and did not have any children of her own. She died in 2008.¹¹

When he immigrated to Mandatory Palestine at the age of 10 and was sent to Kibbutz Ramat David, Alessandro-Sandro Roth changed his name to Zvi Yanai.

¹¹ <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/brunelli-lenti.html>

7. List of Jews

The second story:

When the Second World War broke out, there were about 275 Jews living on the Greek island of Zakynthos in the Ionian Sea. Until 1943 the island was under Italian control and the Jews remained unharmed, however after Mussolini's fall the Germans occupied the Italian territories and on September 9, 1943 a German force landed on the island.

The German commander ordered all Jews to be assembled so that they could be deported to the mainland and from there to the camps in Poland. To prepare for the deportation, the German officer summoned the Greek mayor, Carrer, and ordered him to prepare a list of all the Jews on the island.

The mayor went to the local church leader, Metropolitan Chrysostomos for assistance. Chrysostomos volunteered to negotiate with the Germans and told Carrer to burn the list of Jewish names. He then approached the German commander and implored him not to deport the Jews. The Jews were Greek citizens, he said. They had done no harm to their neighbors and did not deserve to be punished by deportation.

When the German would not listen and insisted on receiving the list of all local Jews, Chrysostomos took a piece of paper, wrote his own name on it and handed it over. "Here is the list of Jews you required", he said.

8. 70 Peoples

G-d created a highly complex and detailed world. Millions of creations, creatures, and, yes, people.

Generally speaking, G-d divided the people and nations of the world into 70. The purpose of this division isn't division but harmony. Each nation is unique in its ability and characteristics. When each of the 70 nations serves G-d in its own inimitable way, together harmony is achieved across all of humanity.

Throughout history, the sad norm was the opposite: nations fought one another; peoples hated one another for the reason that they were simply different peoples.

The Jewish people, of course, were always caught in middle.

World War Two was a battle across the globe, with tens of millions of people killed. A far cry from, Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples. The 70 nations were anything but united.

And we the Jews. The Germans slaughtered six million of our brothers and sisters. Is this a nation that deserves a bull offered in the Temple on Sukkot?

And yet, within it all, there is an Ida Lenti, a young gentile girl who risks everything to save three Jewish children.

There is a Metropolitan Chrysostomos for whom, when it comes to G-d's children, a list of Jews is a list of himself.

That was even during the Nazi terror. Today, many more people of the world's nations – and even entire nations themselves – have served as a haven for Jews and helped support and provide platforms for a renaissance of Jewish life in Israel and all over the world.

This ideal is what is embodied in the 70 bulls representing the 70 nations offered on Sukkot in the Holy Temple.

This transformation from a fragmented 70 nations killing each other and others to a unified “United Nations” of 70 peoples uniting in one Holy Temple, is why the 70 bulls were offered on Sukkot.

9. Conclusion: Today, No Bull, Only Bullish

A lady from the city and her traveling companion were riding the train through Vermont when she noticed some bulls. “What a cute bunch of bulls!” she remarked. “Not a bunch, herd”, her friend replied. “Heard of what?” “Herd of bulls.” “Of course I’ve heard of bulls.” “No, a bull herd.” “What do I care what a bull heard. I have no secrets to keep from a bull!”

Today there are is no bull – literally. We do not bring the physical bull offerings, but we offer them spiritually – through our service and prayers, and through our efforts in inspiring all people we meet to embrace their divine calling.

Today we have to be bullish without bullying. Today, without the physical Temple, we have to recreate through our prayers and service what happened in the Temple and emulate it in our lives, with

the belief that our actions will rebuild the Temple once again, and bring total world peace.

The first thing to keep in mind is our objective and mission: uniting the 70 nations of the world in one proverbial cosmic Sukkah, 70 bulls offered in the Holy Temple united under One G-d.

Imagine the universe as a cosmic orchestra, with 70 different musicians and instruments, each playing their notes, in the right time. No nation is compromised, each is necessary and each complements the other – joining together, harmony within diversity, playing one beautiful symphony.

This is the power of Sukkot. The power to bring peace and harmony for all humankind.

Our joy and service during Sukkot have a cosmic impact on the destiny of the world.

May it lead to the building of the third and eternal Temple with the coming of the Redemption, Amen.

Shabbat Shalom and a joyous Sukkot!

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