

SUBURBAN ORTHODOX CONGREGATION TORAS CHAIM

ISRAEL ACTION SHABBAT ARTICLES PARSHAT TETZAVEH SHUSHAN PURIM MARCH 10, 2001

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(Editor's comments - It is now Purim (or Shushan Purim) so the newsletter will include some articles of a little lighter more humorous nature than usual.)

WEIN ON-LINE: A PURIM FABLE By Berel Wein March 8, 2001

And it was in the days of King Ahashlinton, who was the head of the only superpower left in the world and ruled over 50 states as well as Puerto Rico, Guam and American Samoa, that King Ahashlinton concerned himself with the problems of the State of Israel. He was determined to end the "conflict of a century" by dint of his personality and with the help of a pliant Israeli government. He invited all of the participants in the "conflict of a century" to a number of great parties that he threw for them to impress them with the glories of a "peace process" guaranteed to end the "conflict of a century." And so great was his influence that the Israelis reversed all of their previous policies and long-held beliefs about the true nature of the "conflict of a century" and came willingly and enthusiastically to King Ahashlinton's parties.

The first party was on the West Lawn of King Ahashlinton's White Palace. There did Hamarafat promise, without a smile crossing his lips but with his fingers crossed behind his back, that there would be no more violence from his side and that all matters outstanding regarding the "conflict of a century" would be settled exclusively by negotiation. King Ahashlinton invited all of the "top Jews" of the world to his party and they all came to witness the beginning of the end of the "conflict of a century." The king even provided kosher food for those who still followed those antiquated customs. As part of the agreement worked out at the party, Israel gave up territory, supplied arms and money to Hamarafat and issued stamps and posters to celebrate the foreseen imminent end of the "conflict of a century".

King Ahashlinton got himself into deep marital troubles and there were those evil moral Republicans that even tried to throw him out of his White Palace. But the king was accustomed to getting out of his troubles by using his charm, baldly lying and turning on the pathos, not to speak of out-of-court settlements. This left him with time to keep on trying to end the "conflict of the century". It seems that the "peace process" was somehow getting derailed in spite of everyone involved, except for the king, receiving Nobel prizes for peace. The king was mightily disappointed at being excluded from the prize. Could it be that the prize committee contained Republicans? MEANWHILE, the "peace process" undermined and divided the public in Israel, where its prime minister was assassinated as a direct result of the "peace process". Hamarafat kept up his violence and terrorism and his female representative Zereshashrawi continued to outrageously pillory Israel to worldwide media applause. But it was obvious that the "peace process" was going nowhere.

King Ahashlinton then called for another gala party, this time at Wye Plantation. Again, the participants in the "conflict of a century" participated and a new agreement was signed in which Israel gave up more territory and autonomy to Hamarafat in return for Hamarafat promising to fulfill the promises that he had made at the first West Lawn party. And everyone cheered, for the Yossis of Israel proclaimed that the end of the "conflict of a century" was at hand. But there were some stubborn Jews still around who would not bow down to the idol of a false peace and insisted that Hamarafat was not at all serious about ending the "conflict of a century".

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Many of the "official Jews" in the world blamed these stubborn Jews (some of them being even, God forbid, "settlers") for the fact that the "peace process" wasn't working and that all of the terrorists of Hamarafat were still active in killing Jews. King Ahashlinton was delighted when Israel elected a new leader who promised to settle the "conflict of a century" within 18 months. For that purpose, the king invited everybody to another party, this time at Camp David. (Who is that David? Does he have any connection to Jerusalem? To the Temple Mount? Probably not.)

Here, the Israelis threw in the towel and conceded almost everything if Hamarafat would only keep the promises he made two parties ago. But Hamarafat refused everything offered and started a war against Israel. All the king's efforts could not put the "peace process" back together again. Even the further concessions that Israel offered to Hamarafat at another party at Taba hosted by Memoochasni were not enough for Hamarafat. The new war continued, killing innocent people, but that could not move Hamarafat. Even the brilliant guidelines proposed publicly by the king before he moved out of his White Palace (with the palace silverware in his luggage) were insufficient to settle the "conflict of the century."

IS SHARON a Mordechai? Is Limor Livnat an Esther? How about Dalia Itzik? Who knows? Stay tuned. The God of Israel whose name never appeared in this fable until now, may yet have something to say about the "conflict of the century".

Shabbat Shalom and Purim Sameah

UNKNOWN AUTHOR FOUND ON THE INTERNET

King Ahasuerus was FINNISH with his disobedient wife, Vashti. "You CONGO now!" he ordered her. After she had GHANA way, the king's officers went ROMAN the land to find a new queen. INDIA end, the beautiful Esther won the crown. Meanwhile, Mordecai sat at the palace gate where the notoriously CHILE Haman could CZECH up on him each day. "I HAITI you because you refuse to bow down to me!" Haman yelled. "USA very stubborn man. You and all the other Jews are BAHAMAS! If you keep this up, DENMARK my words; I will have you killed. Just KUWAIT and see, you TURKEY!"

Mordecai tore his clothes, a custom known as KOREA, and urged Esther to plead with the king. All the Jews fasted for three days and grew very HUNGARY. Then Esther approached the king and asked: "KENYA BELIZE come to a banquet that I've prepared for you and Haman?" At the banquet she invited her guests to come to a second banquet to eat SAMOA. And the king asked: "Esther, why JAMAICA big meal like this? Just tell me what you want, and up to half my UNITED KINGDOM, it will be given to you." Esther replied: "SPAIN-ful for me to say this, but Haman is RUSSIAN to kill my people." Haman's loud WALES could be heard as he carried HONDURAN this scene. "OMAN!" Haman cried bitterly, "IRAQ my brains in an effort to destroy the Jews. But that miserable Mordecai; EGYPT me!" Haman and his ten sons were hanged and went immediately to the NETHERLANDS. And to SWEDEN the deal, the Jews were allowed to POLISH off the rest of their foes. The king smiled at Esther and Mordecai and said: "You lost your enemies and UGANDA friend."

And that's why the Purim story ISRAELI a miracle. God decided to CHINA light on our people. So now, let's celebrate! Forget all of your SYRIA'S business and be happy! SERB up some wine, and TAIWAN on! Happy Purim!

ARUTZ-SHEVA OP-ED: THE FOUR SECRETS OF THE MEGILLAH

by Rabbi Shlomo Goren Arutz-7 Israel Radio <<http://www.IsraelNationalNews.com>>
ONE MIRACLE AFTER THE OTHER

The Nation of Israel is an ancient people, well-experienced in miracles. In fact, its history is nothing more than one long chain of divine miracles - concealed and otherwise. Everything it has gone through, all of its ups and downs, its victories and its defeats, and even those that appear to have occurred via a natural course of events, cannot be taken at "face value."

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They cannot be analyzed using the normal scientific-historical methodology, nor can quantifiable considerations such as the balance of powers be solely employed for their understanding. There are historians and researchers who attempt to socio-historically explain the divine phenomenon known as Israel. They endeavor to clarify how, despite the perpetual hatred against them and constant persecution by their neighbors, the Jewish People have managed to survive throughout the centuries as a nation. In trying to explain how this lone sheep can continue to survive and thrive amidst the 70 wolves surrounding it, they ignore the simple historical truth that is the bottom line of the universal bookkeeping - namely, that the Divine Good that is the purpose and destiny of all Creation is the final, determining force.

MARCHING UNYIELDINGLY TOWARDS "GOOD"

True, there are frequent and serious breaks in the historic timeline of mankind's progress towards the longed-for aspiration of Supreme Good. There are reversals and deviations from the path towards the goal, and these are manifest in the suffering of entire generations, in ethical decay, in social corruption. But all these cannot put a stop to the unceasing advance of the Divine Goodness, for always in the end, the final determination is towards the good. Goodness is the driving force behind the predestined progress of the universe.

HOW TO MEASURE? ISRAEL!

The worldwide standard for measuring good and bad, progress and retreat, the highs and lows of mankind - is the People of Israel. The way in which the nations of the world relate to us, on the one hand, and the ethical tensions within Am Yisrael itself, on the other, are the ways in which the world can measure whether it is progressing towards the ultimate goal, or whether it is in a stage of reversal. This is the fundamental principle on which the teachings of the Prophets are founded. It is the basic truth on which is based the Torah's ideal of the End of Days for all of humanity. A most enlightening historic lesson, one which reflects the struggle of the great powers of good and bad, of Amalek and Israel - a struggle that is manifest in a deep-rooted hatred of the nations of the world towards the Eternal People - is provided for us in the Book of Esther, which we read on Purim. Esther herself, the Talmud teaches, asked the Sages to accord "her" Book a distinctive stature among the Holy Scriptures, and for Purim to become a special holiday and be granted a special status in our Torah tradition. As the great Maimonides wrote: "All the Books of the Prophets and the Writings will become null and void during the times of the Messiah - except for the Megillah [Scroll] of Esther, which will stand forever just like the Five Books of Moses and the laws of the Oral Torah that will never be nullified. And even though the memory of all our suffering will be forgotten..., the days of Purim will never be erased, as is written [Esther 9, 28], "These days of Purim will not fail from among the Jews, nor their memory perish from their seed."

THE QUADRUPLE SECRET

What is the secret of the eternity of this Megillah? What is the vision of the future that is hidden in it and in the days of Purim for the End of Days? The answer lies in four eternal fundamentals of Judaism that came to the fore in a concrete way for the Jewish people during the critical period in which the events of Purim occurred. It is in these four tenets that the holiness and supremacy of Megillat Esther are shown. The frantic pace of events that occurred during the story of Purim reflected the excellent qualities of Israel. The Book of Esther was not written to teach us only about that specific period or about the kingdom of Persia - but rather about the future and about the entire world.

FUNDAMENTAL 1: The complete and utter negation of the Exile. The events of Purim teach us that the presence of Am Yisrael [the Nation of Israel] in Exile is not only a national and spiritual danger for Israel, but also a genuine physical and spiritual threat to each and every individual Jew, Heaven forbid. As far as the Jew is concerned, the nations of the world have no grasp of elementary social laws that will safely guarantee his individual and national existence. The Torah's decree, "You will not find calm amongst the nations," is well in force, and has almost always expressed the bitter and true reality of the relationship between the Jews and the nations.

FUNDAMENTAL 2: Divine Providence over Israel. The Megillah teaches us that it occurs in hidden ways, buried among the myriad details of events, each of which is a link in one long and involved chain. We see that the details of time, of place, of form, come together in a great maze of events and people that, in the end, prove to have been intricately woven in advance into one complex and uniform picture. The final picture is what we call a "miracle," even though when it is broken down into its individual pieces we do not see anything unusual.

FUNDAMENTAL 3: Amalek. Another aspect that is hidden among the events of Purim is the memory of the eternal war and hatred from Amalek towards Israel. In this case, it was manifest by Amalek's descendant Haman. The concept of Amalek, the source of all corruption and evil in the world, always appears in an individual or a group, weaving itself in wherever hatred and killing are being perpetrated against Israel. This war is the symbol of the contrast between light and darkness, and between good and bad, and it is for this reason that the Torah commanded us to remember what Amalek stands for and to increase our hatred for the root of the world's evil. "By the L-rd's throne, the L-rd will have war with Amalek throughout the generations." [Ex.7,16]

FUNDAMENTAL 4: Integrity and Purity in Warfare. The Torah concept of "Your [army] camp shall be holy" is a constant reminder that the purpose of war in Israel is for the defense and personal and national security of Israel. The Megillah repeats three different times that the Jews "did not take from the booty." This is the true standard for the holiness of the army during battle and victory. For it was not the personal interest of the fighters that stood before them, but rather the salvation and honor of the entire nation, as is written, "The other Jews in the other nations of the King gathered to protect themselves, and had rest from their enemies - and did not lay their hands on the plunder."

These are the eternal basics of Am Yisrael, and within them hides the secret of the holiness and supremacy of Megillat Esther and Purim for Am Yisrael in general and for its army in particular.

(Rabbi Shlomo Goren was the first Chief Rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces, and later served as Chief Rabbi of Israel. This article was translated from an article on the Yeshivat Beit El website) <http://yeshiva.org.il/>

BIGGEST EVER GOV'T TAKES OFFICE TODAY

Ha'aretz Staff Wednesday, March 7, 2001

Israel's largest government ever, with 26 ministers and 12 deputy ministers, is to be installed today. The Knesset is expected to approve a vote of confidence in the coalition put together by Ariel Sharon in the month since he was directly elected prime minister. The coalition is assured the 73 votes of Likud, Labor, Shas, National Union, Yisrael b'Aliyah, One Nation and New Way - Dalia Rabin Pelesof's one-person faction. But it could be larger with supporting votes from some of Sharon's natural allies who have been left out of the cabinet - the National Religious Party, Geshet, United Torah Judaism, and ex-Likudniks from the remnants of the Center Party. Yet despite the coalition's huge size, there are outstanding issues, especially for Haredi parties, that make the coalition potentially fragile. Topping the Haredi agenda is the issue of national service for Haredim yeshiva students. Shas is insisting that the Knesset pass an administrative order extending the current deferment for two years, not one, or the immediate passage of the Tal bill, which keeps the deferment in place, but allows yeshiva students to seek work starting at the age of 23. An extension of the administrative order would certainly be challenged in the High Court of Justice, which already forced the Knesset to come up with the Tal bill, which it hasn't been able to pass. And having offended 18 MKs from his natural partners - Geshet, the NRP, the Center Party (which will shift dramatically rightward tonight as a former Likud MK and a former member of Tzomet replace the resigning doves Uri Savir and Amnon Lipkin-Shahak), by leaving them out of the government, Sharon may not have reserves to call upon if Shas and the UTJ (which still hasn't actually joined the coalition, waiting for a vote on the yeshiva students deferments) decide to pull out of the government. Up to yesterday, Likud MKs did not know for certain whom Sharon had chosen to fill the eight ministry slots. Last night, starting at 8:30 P.M., the Likud MKs were called to Sharon's office at Likud headquarters in Tel Aviv. And as he has done since the start of the coalition negotiations, Sharon surprised the Likud MKs. While as expected, Silvan Shalom got the treasury, Limor Livnat was named Education Minister, when she had expected Public Security, which went to Uzi Landau. As expected, Reuven Rivlin got the Communications Ministry, but Justice, instead of going to Tzipi Livne, went to Meir Sheerit, who had expected education, and could not hide his disappointment. Late last night, Livne and Tzahi Hanegbi were to hear which of them would get the Environment Ministry with the other getting a ministry without portfolio. Danny Naveh was named the government's coordinator with the Knesset.

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Among the disappointed were long-time Sharon ally Yehoshua Matza, who was offered to be deputy minister in the Public Security Ministry. He turned it down, angrily. Ayoub Kara, the Druze Likud member who had hopes of a ministry, was offered the party whip's job in the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, and turned it down, saying he believes he should be one of the leaders of the party. Michael Eitan, like Matza, a former minister, was offered the coalition whip's job, which he held in the past. He said he'd "think about it." The NRP, playing hardball with the Likud, lost and missed its place at the new, two-desk horseshoe government table in the Knesset plenum. One thousand VIPs, ranging from President Moshe Katzav to the foreign diplomatic corps will be in the gallery for the ritual of the change of government. The Knesset session will open with Sharon informing the house of the ministers who will serve in his government, and presenting a state of the nation speech. That will be followed by Outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Barak's farewell speech. Following Barak's speech, opposition leader Yossi Sarid of Meretz will respond, and then each faction will send someone to the podium to comment on the proposed new government. Only after all the factions have had their chance to speak, does the house vote on the new government. Once the vote is counted, with the new government winning its majority, first the prime minister, then each of his ministers, take the podium to declare that they will "be faithful to the State of Israel and its laws, fulfill my duty as minister, and obey the decisions of the Knesset." At that point, they take their seats at the government table in the center of the plenum floor. That table has grown, to a two-desk horseshoe shaped affair at the cost of NIS 40,000 to accommodate the unprecedentedly large government.

THE TRUTH COMES OUT

Excerpted from Arutz Sheva March 4, 2001

PA Communications Chief Imad Falouji told a PLO rally in southern Lebanon on Friday that the recent intifada had nothing to do with Ariel Sharon's walk on the Temple Mount. The disturbances were planned after the peace talks failed in July, according to Falouji. "It [the uprising] had been planned since Arafat's return from Camp David, when he turned the tables on the former US president and rejected the American conditions," Falouji said. PA officials rejected Falouji's statement, reiterating that it was Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount that had set off the violence. He also told the roaring crowd of supporters that the PLO is now reorganizing to escalate the violence against Israel: "We are going back to the '60s, '70s, and '80s. The Fatah Hawks, the Kassam Brigades, the Red Eagle, and all the military action groups are returning to work." <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/english/newspaper/news/fnews.htm>

FROM THE JEWISH ACTION COMMITTEE March 6, 2001

An article in yesterday's Jerusalem Post by Haim Shapiro entitled "American Airlines: No flights to Tel Aviv if we buy TWA" reports as follows:

American Airlines, which last week submitted what appears to be the leading bid to purchase TWA, has said that if it takes over TWA, it will stop that airline's flights to Tel Aviv.

ACTION We feel that it is critically important to protest immediately to American Airlines' parent company, AMR Corporation. Even the appearance of a move based on compliance with an Arab boycott is a very serious matter and damaging to Israel at this extremely sensitive time. In addition to writing your own letter, we urge you to send the information to your friends and acquaintances and urge them to join JAT.Action.

CONTACT INFORMATION Here are addresses for three top officers in the AMR Corporation. There are also voice and fax phone numbers.

Mr. Donald J. Carty Chairman, President, and CEO AMR Corporation
Mr. Gerard J. Arpey Executive Vice President
Ms. Anne H. McNamara Senior Vice President and Counsel
4333 Amon Carter Blvd Fort Worth, TX 76155
Phone: 817-963-1234 Fax: 817-967-9641

For more information, contact Jewish action at JAT.Action-subscribe@topica.com

ISRAEL CELEBRATES PURIM IN THE SHADOW OF BOMB THREATS Jerusalem Post March 8, 2001

By Margot Dudkevitch, Arie O'Sullivan and Haim Shapiro

Security forces are on high alert as the nation braces to celebrate Purim in the shadow of Hamas threats of more suicide bomb attacks. Thousands of police, soldiers, and border policemen are deployed in busy areas such as bus stations, malls, and markets, with roadblocks set up at the entrances to cities and towns. Despite the high alert, Police Insp.-Gen. Shlomo Aharonishky called on the public to continue its daily routine and participate in the holiday festivities, but to remain alert and report anything suspicious. Police yesterday granted supporters of the outlawed Kach movement a permit to hold a Purim celebration tonight at the Kiryat Arba grave of Baruch Goldstein, who on Purim 1994 shot dead 29 Arab worshipers and injured scores more as they prayed in the Machpela Cave. Goldstein's admirers had originally planned to hold a "commemoration of the righteous" at the grave, where they planned to sing and dance, said spokesman Noam Federman. However, the police permit clearly states the supporters can hold a party and not a "commemoration." Activist Baruch Marzel said participants plan to hold a Purim party. Federman said it was unclear how many people would join in the celebrations, because of the lack of security on the roads.

Peace Now condemned the fact that police granted the group a permit, saying it would encourage Palestinians to launch attacks in revenge. A Peace Now statement said it is unfortunate the police chose to add to tensions in the city at such a time. However, some members of the Hebron Jewish community said they were not aware of any celebrations planned at Goldstein's graveside and did not plan to participate. Instead, they noted that residents plan to hold a Purim market on Friday and on Sunday the annual Adloyada parade would be held in the city, culminating in a festive meal. IDF forces in Hebron are bracing for an outbreak of violence on Friday as the Palestinians mark a "day of rage." Military Intelligence has information that Hamas and Fatah's Tanzim are planning to launch a wave of attacks and unrest following the Id al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) holiday. The purpose of the offensive, the army believes, is to ignite the territories in the period leading up to Pessah and ahead of the Arab summit to be held in Amman in two weeks. At the same time, the IDF expects the Palestinians will use the end of the festival as an opportunity for extremists and fundamentalists to return demonstrators to the street. IDF and Border Police commanders in Hebron expect tonight's Goldstein memorial to spark Arab protests. This week has been relatively quiet in Hebron and some roadblocks have been removed for the holiday, a move which turned out to enhance the quiet even more. But the IDF was to return the roadblocks tonight and increase its presence in the city to smother any unrest.

In Haifa yesterday tensions ran high after reports were received that a suicide bomber had entered the city and was planning to carry out a car-bomb attack. Security forces beefed up their presence in the city and a mobile unit was deployed to the bus station to check travelers' bags, but the day passed without incident. The initial report came from Tel Aviv residents, who told police that a Palestinian with whom they had chatted on the Internet said he planned an attack. Dep. Cmdr. Doron Cohen, chief of police operations in the coastal area, said that while police had received information of possible terror attacks, there was nothing specific. Cohen stressed the importance of allowing the public to continue its daily routine without restrictions. Two parades that took place in the city passed smoothly yesterday, but other areas such as Ramat Hasharon and Holon decided to cancel mass Purim celebrations because of the terror threats. Gush Katif residents together with the Habad movement plan to hand out 6,000 holiday packages (mishlochei manot) to soldiers serving in the region tomorrow. Purim, the holiday celebrating the victory of the Jews over the evil machinations of Haman, as recorded in the Book of Esther, falls tonight, but for residents of Jerusalem the holiday extends into a three-day "triangular Purim" as confusing as a Purim masquerade ball. The issue relates to the fact that while Jews throughout the Persian Empire had to defend themselves for one day, on 14 Adar, the Jews of ancient Shushan defended themselves for two days, deferring the holiday for one day. According to tradition, Shushan Purim is marked not only in Shushan, but also in cities which were encircled by a wall at the time of Joshua. In modern Israel, the only city definitely recognized as falling into that category is Jerusalem.

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However, Purim this year is on Thursday night and Friday. If Shushan Purim were observed the next day, it would be on Shabbat. Thus Shushan Purim is deferred, but not entirely. The Megila, the Scroll of Esther, is read on Thursday night and Friday morning, as elsewhere in Israel. However, the festive meal and the exchange of gifts of food among friends are both deferred until Sunday. On the other hand, the other commandment regarding Purim, the giving of gifts to the poor, is not deferred, and gifts are to be given on Friday. According to the sages, the needy should not have to wait for their gifts.

VOWING SECURITY, SHARON TAKES REINS IN ISRAEL NEW YORK TIMES March 8, 2001 BY Deborah Sontag

JERUSALEM, March 7 - Prime Minister Ariel Sharon wore his new persona as the tough but benevolent grandfather of a nervous nation when he took office tonight, forgoing any lofty promises of peace and prosperity in the face of a deepening conflict with the Palestinians. Instead, in a straightforward speech that made little attempt to soar rhetorically, Mr. Sharon said his primary objective was pragmatic: to provide security to Israel while fighting diligently against violence and terrorism. In presenting his broad coalition government to Parliament, he called for a "unity of hearts" and for endurance among Israelis. And, in fleetingly conciliatory remarks, Mr. Sharon, a 73-year-old right-wing leader and former warrior, appealed directly to the Palestinians to abandon the conflict that "has caused heavy suffering to both peoples." "If there is desire on both sides, I believe we can veer away from this bitter path of blood on which we are marching," he said. "Our hand is extended in peace."

Ahmed Qurei, a senior Palestinian official, said the Palestinians welcomed a change in the Israeli leadership. But they believe that it is up to the Israelis to pull back their tanks and troops and stop the violence, he said. And they already dismiss Mr. Sharon's goal of a nonbelligerency accord - a long-term "diplomatic arrangement" - rather than a final peace agreement, he added. "He is tough and difficult, but at least he knows what he wants and we know what he wants," Mr. Qurei, who is known as Abu Ala, said in an interview. "I'm sure he will try to make life easier on the ground for the Palestinians. That is what he says. But if this is not accompanied by hope for the future, it will be a real problem."

As the Israeli Parliament buzzed with activity today, security was in a palpably high state of alert throughout the country. Militant Palestinian groups have threatened to greet the government of Mr. Sharon, who is reviled in much of the Arab world, with a series of attacks. And the festive Jewish holiday of Purim, which begins on Thursday night although costumed Israelis are already roaming the streets, was the date of a traumatic bombing several years ago. Against the backdrop of the conflict and owing to a kind of exhaustion with the political tumult here, the festivities in Parliament today were decidedly low-key. It is only 20 months after the last new government was celebrated; Mr. Sharon, Israel's 11th prime minister, is also its fifth prime minister in six years.

Parliament took a crucial step to reform the electoral system that may help Mr. Sharon's government, whose term ends in November 2003, to survive. It repealed the direct election law under which the prime minister is elected on a separate ballot - a quasi-presidential, quasi-parliamentary system that did not function well. In returning to a strict parliamentary system, smaller parties would lose some of their strength. That could make them more hesitant to topple the government and force new elections. With his hand on a Hebrew-language Bible, Mr. Sharon was sworn into office late tonight. After a month of mostly deft political negotiations, he took the helm of a hydra-headed coalition with the largest Israeli cabinet ever. It is so large that a second horseshoe-shaped table had to be built to accommodate 26 ministers in two tiers at the front of Parliament. Composed of seven parties, the unity government will struggle to be cohesive as Israeli peaceniks share power not only with hawks like Mr. Sharon but also with extreme right-wingers who support the "transfer" of the Palestinian population to neighboring Arab countries. Mr. Sharon already faces pressure from his partners on the left and right as he seeks to cobble together a new approach to the violence. Shimon Peres, for instance, an inveterate peacemaker who took office today as Mr. Sharon's foreign minister, is eager to restart peace negotiations with the Palestinians immediately despite the new prime minister's insistence that no talks should begin until the violence halts.

"I shall stand on my own," Mr. Peres said, although the coalition agreement states that the prime minister has to authorize any diplomatic initiative in advance. The new government has a commanding majority of 73 out of 120 seats in Parliament. It is a motley union of the three largest parties - Mr. Sharon's Likud, Mr. Peres's Labor and the ultra-Orthodox Shas - joined by a small Russian immigrant party, a tiny workers' party and an ultra-nationalist bloc. Dalia Rabin-Pelosoff, daughter of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, broke away from the Center Party to form a one-woman faction in order to join the coalition as deputy defense minister. Some of Mr. Sharon's natural allies have ended up outside the government because they did not get what they wanted from the coalition negotiations. That is most striking in the case of the National Religious Party, which represents the settlers' movement. Mr. Sharon is an architect of the settlements' expansion and is considered a strong ally of the enterprise, although he stated tonight that the coalition guidelines would not allow any new settlements to be built. When he stepped into the thin air at the summit of power, he realized an ambition that many here have long thought unrealistic. He now has a chance to redeem his legacy, which was tarnished by his conduct as defense minister during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Mr. Sharon was forced to resign after an Israeli commission found him indirectly responsible for the massacre by Christian Phalangists of Palestinian refugees inside a camp in Beirut that was ringed by Israeli troops. After that, many Israelis thought him forever unelectable to Israel's top post. But he never left public life. And almost two decades later, his ascent was as quick as it was unexpected. It came little more than five months after he was rebuked internationally for a visit to the plaza outside Al Aksa mosque to assert Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount. With that visit began the deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations, although there is much debate about whether Mr. Sharon played a critical role as a catalyst. But five months of continuing conflict with the Palestinians made many Israelis eager to turn to Mr. Sharon, who has decades of experience and an iron fist. "Anybody who looks at your cabinet table understands that the pendulum has swung strongly to the right," Avraham Burg, the Parliament speaker, said to Mr. Sharon. "But from that right, you have pledged to make peace." Mr. Sharon presents himself as a pragmatic leader who has no desire to provoke a worsening of the conflict. He acknowledges his image as a warmonger but says that his many experiences on the battlefield have taught him the profound meaning of peace. Real peace is not on the imminent horizon, he says; it will take time to build mutual trust. But the goal now, anyway, is to manage the conflict, to improve life for the Israelis and the Palestinians, he said. Doron Rosenblum, a columnist for the newspaper Haaretz, wrote today that it was worth investing some faith in Mr. Sharon, at least for a while. "While his predecessor spoke of high goals and promised enormous changes, only to leave behind them scorched earth, who knows?" Mr. Rosenblum wrote. "Perhaps the elderly Sharon, who is making no promises, will leave a garden behind him? It's always good to have hope."

ISRAEL WORRIED BY SYRIAN BID FOR UN ROLE

By Nitzan Horowitz Ha'aretz Correspondent March 8, 2001

WASHINGTON - The inclusion of Syria as one of the non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council is becoming a growing concern in Israel, and Jerusalem is considering how to foil the possibility. The elections for the new grouping of non-permanent Security Council members are planned for November. Each of the 10 countries elected in addition to the five permanent members (U.S., Russia, Britain, France and China), holds the position for two years. It has become a tradition at the Security Council that one Arab country is included among the non-permanent members. Currently, Tunisia holds the post. Now Syria is hoping to fill the position. Syria's bid has already garnered significant Arab and Asian support at the UN. It is also believed that there is African support for Syria. In recent days, major international players, such as France, Russia and China, and other countries, have agreed to support the Syrian quest. A European Union source told Ha'aretz yesterday that Brussels will find it difficult to oppose the election of Syria. What still remains unclear is whether the U.S. will pose serious opposition to the Syrian bid. In the past, Washington placed serious obstacles to the inclusion of Arab countries in the Security Council because of their alleged involvement in terrorism. During the 1990s, the UK and the U.S. succeeded in preventing the inclusion of Libya in the council, and supported the entry of Egypt as an alternative.

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It is still uncertain what the stance of the new U.S. administration will be, although it is expected that there will be opposition to the Syrian bid. At this stage Washington is not enthusiastic about taking on the UN in a struggle against Syria, particularly since the Bush administration is making efforts to rally Syrian support in a revived Arab coalition against Baghdad. However, active Jewish and Israeli lobbying may alter the situation by November. The Israeli ambassador to the UN, Yehuda Lancry, said yesterday that the candidacy of Syria contradicts article 23 of the international body's charter which emphasizes that the candidates for Security Council membership must contribute to international peace and security. Israeli sources say it may be difficult to suggest to the U.S. to implement a stance to the Syrian candidacy like it did for Libya and Sudan, because Syria has already participated in peace talks with Israel.

THE OSLO PROCESS IS DEAD. GOOD.

WALL STREET JOURNAL February 28, 2001

By Joshua Cooper Ramo, the foreign editor of Time magazine.

If you're wondering how you can impress your friends with the depth of your Middle East savvy this weekend, you might follow a simple cocktail-party script that I have seen repeated several times since the election of Ariel Sharon as Israel's prime minister: Sigh, stare into your cocktail glass, look up with moist eyes, and say, "Well, this really is the death of Oslo." If there is one consensus view about Ariel Sharon, it is that his landslide victory and his luring of the Labor Party into a unity government have buried the tortuous peace process that kicked off with the surprise announcement of a path to a final settlement in 1993. But conventional wisdom notwithstanding, the death of Oslo may not be cause for tears. In many ways Oslo was the archetype of Clinton-style peacemaking, an approach that appealed to the kind of man Bill Clinton believed he was -- a strong, charismatic interlocutor.

But for all of its optimism, Oslo was destined to fail as an architecture for peace. Few saw this at the time. It was barely apparent to the world until last summer, when Yasser Arafat turned away Ehud Barak's last, best offer on a final agreement during a rushed Camp David meeting. The problem with Oslo is that it was inspired by the Camp David Accords that brought peace between Israel and Egypt in 1978. Oslo was constructed as if the Palestinians and the Israelis were two states making peace with one another. Peace was an endpoint in Camp David and it was meant to be for Oslo as well. But a Palestinian and Israeli peace is really just a beginning, particularly for the Palestinian state that would be born as a result of any deal. It was this realization that ultimately caused Mr. Arafat to walk away from Mr. Barak's final deal. And it is the reason we should be eager to move beyond Oslothink.

For Mr. Arafat, there was no appeal to a post-peace agreement Palestine. Sure, one of the conditions of Oslo would be that the Palestinians would get their own state. But to those who dealt with Mr. Arafat, it became increasingly clear (in as much as anything is ever clear with Mr. Arafat) that a state was the last thing he was ready for. After all, the Palestinian Authority has been a disastrous failure. It is corrupt, incompetent and riddled with inefficiency. Talk to Israelis about what they dreamed for in a post-deal world and they had a clear and concrete vision. They hoped for an economy rich with more Nasdaq listings, stable enough to attract international investment, and for a rapid road to peace with Syria, which would clear the way for a new Middle Eastern economic renaissance. Palestinians had no such pleasant view. Mr. Arafat could expect to receive billions in U.S. aid. But he could also expect to receive hundreds of thousands of returning refugees from places like Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. He could expect chaos as the factions under him struggled for their piece of the pie. And he could expect to deal with death threats from extremists who would prey on the anger of a population trapped by poverty. After a peace deal Israel might have become the Silicon Valley of the Mideast. But Palestine seemed destined to become Watts. Oslo didn't take this into account. Oslo was just about getting to a deal. In fact, a successful peace process will be not only about getting to a deal but also about building up a credible idea of Palestine. In many ways this is much more difficult than a simple state-to-state deal like the one Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat managed with Jimmy Carter. The message Secretary of State Colin Powell should be sending to the region's Arab leaders is that they must begin to support the construction of a credible Palestinian economy and state.

Saudi Arabia, which has promised billions to Mr. Arafat, has suspended its payments because of corruption in the Palestinian Authority. The Saudis and others must help, and even pressure, Mr. Arafat into cleaning up corruption, building an economic system that is attractive to international investors, and starting to create a land based on laws, not charismatic rule. These reforms will take decades. But they need not be complete before peace talks can begin again. They only need be credibly advanced enough that Mr. Arafat, or whoever comes after him, can picture what a post-peace state looks like. That vision will be enough to get them to sign a fair and reasonable agreement in confidence that it will lead to a better future. Then we can all go back to Oslo and start again.

CALENDAR OF ISRAEL EVENTS

SECURITY NOW PEACE LATER?

RELIGIOUS ZIONISTS DISCUSS THE ISRAELI ELECTION

THURSDAY, MARCH 15 7:30pm-9:00pm

Features Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Weinreb, Dr. Arnold Blumberg and Aron Raskas. To be held at the Baltimore Hebrew University auditorium on Park Heights Avenue. Co-sponsored by the Suburban Orthodox Toras Chaim Israel Action Committee.

AIPAC NATIONAL POLICY CONFERENCE MARCH 18-20 Hilton Hotel in Washington DC

VICTIMS OF TERROR COMMUNITY WALKATHON APRIL 1

Detail to be announced as available (see March 3 newsletter).

ISRAEL INVESTMENT CLUB MEETING WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18, 7:30pm-9:00pm, BZD Israel Investment clubs meet at the BZD office on Old Court Road. For more information, contact Joshua Mauer, Club Financial Advisor at (410) 602-6436.

YOM HAZIKARON – ISRAEL MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVANCE
Co-Sponsored by BZD APRIL 24 Liberty Jewish Center

YOM HA'ATZMAUT – ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY
CELEBRATION - LAWN CONCERT APRIL 26 5:00pm-8:00pm
Co-Sponsored by BZD at Yeshiva Rambam

OTHER PROGRAMS INCLUDE TRIPS TO ISRAEL, ETC. WILL BE REPORTED IN FUTURE EDITIONS.

IF THERE ARE ANY ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE COMMUNITY THAT ARE ISRAEL BASED, PLEASE LET US KNOW BY E-MAIL TO SHELDONB@RSFCHART.COM.

Also, let us know if you want this newsletter delivered by E-mail, just send us your E-mail to the above address and say "Send the Israel bulletin".