What to pray for this Yom Kippur?

written by David M. Weinberg | 22.09.2023

As you settle back on the synagogue bench or your living room armchair to contemplate life, here are a couple of things to pray for this Yom Kippur:

Pray that Israelis can halt the vulgarization of society; the unbridled, untamed confrontation in which we harshly judge and stereotype one another. Pray for leaders who will end the propagation of needless hatred and eschew inflammatory, seditious demagoguery. Pray for the marginalization of political scoundrels who seek to fan anti-religious passions, and for the sidelining of religious zealots who commandeer theology to provoke unnecessary conflict.

Pray for an end to wild exaggerations and exceedingly belligerent characterizations in the context of debate over judicial reform, especially the near antisemitic and pseudo-BDS language that the opposition has used against the coalition, and the demonizing language about Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

Pray that the justices of the Israeli Supreme Court realize that they have pushed too far in supplanting their predilections for the will of elected representatives, and that the Justice Minister and Knesset Law Committee Chairman realize that they have pushed too far is seeking to override the court.

Pray that all parties employ self-restraint, shy away from full-scale constitutional confrontation, and seek compromise. Pray that despite out-of-proportion protests, some truly needed and reasonable judicial reforms are indeed completed.

Pray that troublemakers will fail to subvert the IDF through mass refusal-to-serve protests, and that high self-worth so-called “captains” of the Israeli tech world refrain from purposefully undermining global confidence in the Israeli economy.

Pray that Ultra-Orthodox Israeli leaders pull back from their callous plans to ram Torah study as a privileged right equivalent to army service down the throats of the broad public through constitutional legislation, thereby exempting every haredi young man from the military draft, forever. This is no way to build consensus in Israeli society or to advance aspirations for national return to religious belief.

Pray that the government coalition withdraws some of its unbalanced and unwise legislative initiatives such as bills allowing public servants to accept gifts, allowing the police to search private homes without a warrant, legalizing the death penalty for terrorists, significantly expanding the jurisdiction of Israeli rabbinical courts without reforming the Chief Rabbinate, allowing the Knesset speaker to choose the chairman of the Central Elections Committee, and more.

Pray that we can reenergize our national spirit with Zionist and Jewish values, and with historical perspective that allows us to see the positive in this country and to recognize our achievements. How fortunate we are to be living in the modern miracle of the State of Israel after 2,000 years of diaspora, dispersion, and degradation! Pray on that. Dwell on that. Appreciate that.

Pray furthermore for Zionism, now under assault by revisionist educators, post-Zionist politicians, a cynical media, and a public that is plain tired. Pray that "intellectuals" who would question Israel's morality and just achievements fail in corroding our patriotism. Pray that we succeed in teaching our children pride in the accomplishments of Zionism along with a sense of responsibility for its continuation.

Pray for Jewish continuity and peoplehood. Pray that secular Israeli Jews discover there is more to being Jewish than composing folk ballads in Hebrew, serving in the infantry, or demonstrating for "de-mo-crat-ya"; that Ultra-Orthodox Israeli Jews discover that they can and must contribute to society outside yeshiva; that Diaspora Jews don't evaporate into a haze of assimilated, amorphous nouveau-non-identity. Pray that faith and modernity can be woven into a new tapestry uniting us all.

Pray for more Aliyah from the West. Keep those American, Canadian, and French immigrants coming! Expand opportunities for their settlement and employment in the Galilee, Negev, and the strategic Samarian mountains overlooking Gush Dan. Bring back Israeli government funding for repatriation of young Israeli scientists abroad (a program which foolishly and outrageously was cut last week in order to instead fund mikvah construction, Kollel stipends, and pilgrimage travel to Uman).

Pray for all the incredible volunteers in Israeli society, who run thousands of non-profit associations devoted to social welfare, making this country one of the most

altruistic societies in the world. May they all be strengthened and rewarded!

Pray that the dangerous deterioration of American resolve, prestige and power under US presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden comes to a halt. Pray that the poisonous discourse dividing America can be overcome by leaders of greater elevation. Are Joe Biden and Donald Trump the absolute best candidates for president of America in 2024 that 340 million Americans can come up with?

Pray for Israeli peace with Saudi Arabia. Pray that Biden, Netanyahu, and Mohammed Bin Salman are crafty enough to maneuver around the naysayers and saboteurs who would scuttle a grand regional peace and security accord on the altar of stale paradigms (like Palestinian statehood now). Pray for expansion of the Abrahamic circle of peace to Niger, Oman, and Indonesia.

Pray that Palestinians subsequently get the hint and sue for realistic conciliation with Israel – so that they too can benefit from the emerging new era of cooperation in the Mideast.

Pray for regime change in Iran, and for newfound international mettle in dismantling, and if necessary, destroying, Iran's nuclear bomb production facilities.

Pray for Jerusalem. Pray that Wakf malevolence and our government's gross malfeasance do not bring down the crumbling walls of the Temple Mount. Pray that Israel finds the national backbone to reassert sovereignty on the Holy Mount in the face of increasingly flagrant and destructive Palestinian behavior – despite the international condemnation that is sure to ensue, whatever Israel does. Pray that this year Jews will be able to openly pray on the Temple Mount.

Pray for protection from the global riffraff and their corrupted international institutions, such as the UN Human Rights Commission, UN "Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territories," UNESCO, International Criminal Court, and the International Court of Justice – that would try Israeli leaders for "war crimes," boycott our academics, impose sanctions on our trade, and which overall demonize Israel and delegitimize the Jewish People. Pray for world leaders with clarity of thought who understand the challenges of our times and appreciate Israel's heroic struggle.

Pray for protection from terrorism, especially for Israeli residents of Judea and

Samaria. Pray that the IDF be given the freedom to operate extensively enough to guarantee that Yesha residents are not picked-off one-by-one by jihadist gangs. Pray that the string of fumbles and operational errors in our army, police, and prison services come to an end. Pray that Israel regains a lean, mean deterrent posture – especially on the northern border versus Hezbollah and on the southern border versus Hamas.

Pray that Israel will rule emphatically in Area C of Judea and Samaria, preserving what is left of Israel's de facto sovereign control there, by approving road and other infrastructure projects that will benefit both Jewish and Arab residents of this area; by dismantling illegal Bedouin and Palestinian settlements that purposefully impinge on strategic routes; and by quelling vigilante violence by extremist settler youth.

Pray that the government will act to end minority community anarchy and lawlessness. Israel can no longer afford the purposeful and self-destructive sectarianism of its minority communities. Pray that to start with, the Israel Police and General Security Service embark on a massive campaign to confiscate the tens of thousands of unlicensed weapons in Israeli Arab communities.

Pray like this: "Give Israel good friends, honorable allies, and the resources to be as self-reliant as possible. Make Israel strong enough to work with the world, not fight with it; free enough to contribute creatively to the world, not be crushed by boycott and demonization; stout enough to set its own red lines and to defend them, not be hobbled by feeble red (or Green) lines blithely set by others; brainy enough to be respected by the world, not bullied by it. And if necessary, give us the fortitude to go it alone (against Iran, and more)."

Published in The Jerusalem Post, September 22, 2023; and Israel Hayom, September 24, 2023.