

APRIL 2, 2007

Shabbat Chol HaMo'ed Pesach

Time to Wise Up

Mah ha'avodah hazot lachem "What is this service to you?" (Haggadah shel Pesach)

At the start of the *magid* section of the Haggadah, we learn of the four sons. While all four sons display different characteristics, the biggest difference is between the *rasha* and the *chacham*. The *chacham* has great interest in the story and great wisdom while the *rasha* is unwise and disinterested. The *rasha* is faulted for his question and the Haggadah relates that, by excluding himself from the story of the Exodus, he has brought blame onto himself.

At first, it might seem strange to blame the *rasha* for his offense – after all, his question is similar to the question of the *chacham*. The wise son asks, *mah ha'eidot v'hachukim v'hamishpatim asher tzivah haShem Elokeinu etchem? Etchem*, he says...not *otanu*. He, too, seems to be excluding himself from everyone else. The difference between the *rasha* and the *chacham* is the context from which their questions are asked. The *chacham*, always interested in understanding, asks his question in the context of inclusion – *haShem Elokeinu...not Elokeinchem*. The *rasha* was never interested in understanding. He stands outside the community and mocks.

We must always consider the context of people's statements. Not just the context of their words, but the context of their actions. As Iran continues to defy the international community over its nuclear program and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continues to make inflammatory comments about Israel and the West, his intentions grow further and further beyond debate. In this case, the context couldn't be clearer.

The U.N. Security Council's unanimous decision on March 24 to adopt a second round of sanctions on Iran represents a more assertive and united effort by the international community to stop Iran's nuclear weapons program. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1747 imposes an arms embargo on Tehran, tightens financial constraints and freezes the assets of individuals and organizations affiliated with Iran's nuclear program and with Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The international community must now bring the full force of these sanctions to bear against Tehran. We should have the courage to label Ahmadinejad's intentions exactly as Resolution 1747 does under Chapter VII, Article 41 of the U.N. Charter – "a threat to international peace and security." ■

Real Leadership

Vayomar panai yeileichu "And He said, I will go before you" (Exodus 32:14)

After the sin of the golden calf, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people. Moses, concerned that he has been ordered to lead the people forward without any direction, asks God who will be sent with him. God answers with our *pasuk*. In his commentary on this verse, Rashi says that God will not send another servant to lead, but do it Himself.

We have learned from Moshe, in Parashat Yitro, that leadership sometimes requires us to let go of direct control and delegate our work. Here, the Torah teaches us that leadership also requires our direct action.

The so-called Arab Peace Initiative, originally proposed in 2002 and relaunched recently at a meeting of the Arab League in Riyadh, represents an unacceptable offer and a threat to the survival of Israel as a Jewish state. The initiative calls for an Israeli return to the 1967 borders, the creation of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the so-called “right of return” of Palestinian refugees. While Israel has agreed to use the document as a basis for negotiations, the Arab governments have taken a “take-it-or-leave-it” attitude – threatening Israel with region-wide conflagration and refusing negotiation on any of the points. The Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, said that if Israel rejected the proposal, she was putting the Jewish state’s future, “in the hands of the lords of war.”

The Arab Peace Initiative is not a serious proposal. The Middle East needs Arab leaders to lead – not to retrace old, cynical proposals in order to appear to be leading. We know from the Saudi Peace Initiative, proposed just before the Arab plan in 2002 and excluding the issue of refugees, that moderate Arab leaders are capable of bolder strokes than the Riyadh plan. We also know that Israel’s leadership has expressed enthusiasm for negotiation. If only the Arab countries were equipped with such leaders. ■

Time to Act

Ha’atzamot hay’veishot shimu d’var HaShem “O dry bones, hear the word of HaShem” (Ezekiel 37:4)

Talmud (BT Sanhedrin, *perek cheilek*) discusses our *haftarah* reading for Shabbat *Chol Hamoed Pesach*. There, Rav explains the origin of the famous “dry bones” which Ezekiel brings back to life. According to Rav, the bones were those of certain members of the tribe of Ephraim who had miscalculated when the slavery in Egypt should have ended and left before the appointed time.

We all know the importance of proper timing. Had the Ephraimites waited to leave Egypt with their brothers and sisters, their fate might have been very different. But proper timing doesn’t always involve waiting. Sometimes it involves taking action.

In a recent interview with *The Financial Times*, the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (I.A.E.A.), Mohamed ElBaradei, stated that, “it could be six months, it could be a year” until Iran is capable of enriching uranium on an industrial scale. On March 24th the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted new sanctions against Iran’s nuclear and weapons programs. In response to these sanctions, Iran’s Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, declared that suspension of nuclear enrichment “is neither an option nor a solution.”

Along with the measures of the international community, the US government has worked to establish even tougher sanctions against Iran. The Treasury Department has targeted its banking and oil sectors and companies doing business with its elite military Republican Guard. Now, many states are beginning to explore public fund divestiture from companies doing business in Iran.

Israel, the United States, and her allies agree that this is our last chance to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons. In addition to the help of Congress, our state legislators can help by divesting state pension funds from the terror-supporting regime in Tehran. ■