

APRIL 9, 2007

Parashat Sh'mini

Old and New

Vayikchu v'nei Aharon Nadav v'Avihu ish mitachto viyitnu vahan eish. *“The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan and put fire in them.”* (Leviticus 10:1)

As we know Nadav and Avihu both offered a service in the mishkan that was not requested, nor allowed. While commentators have struggled for years with the challenge of the exact sin that Aharon's sons committed, the general sin is clear: there is a protocol of law to adhere to that one cannot choose to simply disregard.

Ibn Ezra, commenting on the next *pasuk*, actually praises the brothers for wanting to do the right thing. Nadav and Avihu's intentions were not sinful, only their actions were. They wanted their service to be accepted by HaShem. Ibn Ezra teaches us that one must be loyal to precedent.

The international community has placed three requirements on Hamas for winning world recognition: they must recognize Israel's right to exist, end violence and terror, and accept previously negotiated agreements. The reasons for the first two are obvious. Peace can only be made when each side recognizes that the other has a right to exist. In the recent “unity government” agreement between Hamas and Fatah, former U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross has said that Israel appears only as an adjective modifying words like “aggression” and “occupation,” never as noun. The second reason is equally clear. Israel can only negotiate with a true partner for peace – not an organization committed to bombing innocent civilians.

The third reason is the one we learn about from Nadav and Avihu. Past agreements have been painstakingly negotiated over time and represent broad areas of agreement between the two sides. Regardless of our intentions, as Nadav and Avihu found out, new efforts will only work when combined with the old. ■

A Wiser Course

Vayishmah Moshe vayitav b'einav *“And Moshe heard and it was good in his eyes”* (Leviticus 10:20)

After Moshe scolds his brother for making a mistake, Aharon explains his action and Moses is pleased. Sforno, in his commentary on this verse, tells us that Moshe is not only pleased that Aharon made the right decision, but that he had acted wisely in spite of Moses' commands.

Teachers and parents know that our most proud moments are not when a student or child follows directions and comes to a good conclusion, but when those we have taught apply their knowledge to a situation and act rightly. This is the difference between instruction and learning.

The Arab League's recent decision to reaffirm the 2002 Arab peace initiative could serve as the basis for dialogue between the Arabs and Israel if it is used as an opening to negotiations rather than as an ultimatum. However, the current positions of the Arab League—including support for violence and the “right of return” of Palestinian refugees—are not conducive to a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Israel is committed to exploring peace with the Palestinians and Arab states, but the Arabs have rejected negotiations and threatened Israel with continued violence if it does not unconditionally accept the Arab plan.

As Prime Minister Olmert has indicated, the Arab Initiative makes for a good basis for negotiation but is not acceptable in its current form. The wise thing to do, if the Arab governments are serious about peace, would be to accept the Prime Minister's invitation to discussion. Treating the proposal as an ultimatum, however, is hardly an act of wisdom. ■

Not Just For Friends

V'eit hachasidah “*And the stork*” (Leviticus 11:19)

A few *p'sukim* earlier, we begin a list of birds which are prohibited for our consumption. The Torah refers to them as *sheketz* – detestable things. Included in the list is our *pasuk* which prohibits eating the *chasidah*. The Talmud (BT Chulin 63a) notes that the stork is called *chasidah* because it acts with *chesed* toward its friends. How can something that treats its friends with kindness be *sheketz*? Furthermore, Ramban comments that the birds prohibited in this portion are forbidden because they are cruel. Where is the cruelty of the stork? R. Yitzchak Meir Alter, in his *Chidushei HaRim*, provides a wonderful answer: we must do *chesed* for everyone, not just our friends.

If we extend this rule into the realm of government, it becomes even more obvious. A governing authority cannot only protect its friends or those who line its pockets. Governments must protect everyone equally.

We all know that Israel is a democratic nation run by the rule of law. Those who oppose the actions of the government can form a political party and run for Knesset or can seek satisfaction in Israel's judicial system. When cases of corruption arise, they are exposed publicly and prosecuted according to the law.

In contrast, the Palestinian Authority continues to act disreputably and backwardly. According to the World Bank, institutions, organizations and persons in the Palestinian Authority received more than \$1.2 billion in 2006. According to the International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.) and the U.N., there was an overall increase in financial support for the P.A. in 2006 despite the embargo on Hamas. Still, leaders in the P.A. continue to make terrible, irresponsible decisions as to how to spend money. The bloated variety of “security forces” keep seeing additions made to the payrolls. International financial agencies have begged the P.A. to stop this destructive practice. The money that Hamas is able to smuggle in (in large increments of cash across the Gaza-Egypt border) is used to buy guns, explosives, and loyalty. When the P.A. does invest in new schoolbooks, they are found to be filled with anti-Semitism, the denial of the existence of Israel, and the teaching of “martyrdom.” Civil service workers go without paychecks while paid gunmen roam the streets of Gaza.

The world, in an ongoing act of *chesed*, goes out of its way to help the Palestinian people. Palestinian leaders must do more to help their own people. ■