

SEPTEMBER 24, 2007

Shabbat Chol HaMo'ed Sukkot

Out on a Limb

Panai yeileichu “*My face will go*” (Exodus 33:14)

Moshe, after reminding HaShem that He promised to send an angel out before the people and that Moshe has found favor in God’s eyes, asks *hodi’eini na et darchechah*. God responds with our *pasuk*. Talmud (Brachot 7b) interprets this verse to mean that God will do so when He is no longer angry with B’nai Yisrael. Rashi has a different interpretation – “I (God) am no longer planning on sending an angel, but will go before you Myself.”

We’ve all heard the phrase “If you want something done right, you’ve got to do it yourself.” While good leaders also know how and when to delegate, they must be willing to go out on a proverbial limb and take bold steps.

Such leadership in the Arab world is needed now. To facilitate peace efforts between Palestinians and Israelis, Arab states – especially U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia – must begin to prepare their own people to recognize Israel’s right to exist and support a peace agreement with the Jewish state. The Arab League boycott of Israel must end in all its forms. While Bahrain and Oman have ended the boycott as part of their free trade agreements with the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Arab countries continue to boycott the Jewish state. Arab leaders could make a major contribution to peace by visiting Israel, encouraging trade with it and opening diplomatic ties.

Arab states should also reject the violence and extremism of terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hizballah.

Given that Arab leaders have spent decades demonizing Israel – or allowing the demonization to take place – such efforts would require bold and decisive leadership. As Israel and the Palestinians prepare for a high-level meeting this fall, the support of key Arab states is more critical than ever. To help peace talks succeed, Arab states must reverse old policies and take a new direction. ■

Missing the Principles

V’alitah vaboker el Har Sinai “*And ascend Mt. Sinai in the morning*” (Exodus 34:2)

As Moshe goes up Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah, he is in for a long stay – 40 days and 40 nights. In the Midrash (Sh’mot Rabbah 41:6) R. Abbahu wonders if even Moshe could have learned the entire Torah in such a short period of time. Rather, he says, it was the principles of the Torah that he learned.

The Midrash makes a wonderful point – we may not always be able to get all the details right, but we should be able to grasp the principles.

Iran recently signed an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to resolve outstanding issues over Iran's nuclear program. Unfortunately, the deal charts an inappropriate policy at variance with Security Council decisions.

The deal does not require Iran to suspend its nuclear activity or provide access to key people, facilities and documents that are needed to verify Iranian claims about its nuclear activities. The agreement also fails to resolve international concerns with Iran's nuclear program, but rather sets a new timetable for Iran to address past questions that the IAEA has sought answers to repeatedly over the years.

The understandings facilitate Iranian stalling tactics by mandating that each outstanding issue related to its nuclear program be resolved sequentially, potentially dragging out the process for months and providing an excuse for Russia and China to oppose further U.N. sanctions. The framework rules out future inquiries by IAEA inspectors, stating that once the IAEA has investigated the nuclear sites currently under suspicion, there would be "no more remaining issues and ambiguities," even if new information surfaces later that confirms Iran's nuclear ambitions.

This all goes on as Iran continues to violate U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1737 and 1747, which demand that it suspend its nuclear activities.

While the international community continues to struggle with the details of how to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, surely we must be able to agree on the principles. In spite of the self-defeating IAEA agreement, the Security Council must quickly move to impose new, stricter sanctions. And Congress should pass the Iran Counter Proliferation Act and the Iran sanctions Enabling Act (which the House has already approved). ■

All is Breath

Haveil havalim, hakol havel "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

As we know, each of the Pilgrimage Festivals is characterized by a *megillah* and the book for Sukkot is Kohelet. It seems odd that such a joyous holiday would include the reading of a book that begins on such a seemingly down note. *HaKol havel*, indeed! It is important, however, to note that the literal definition of the word *havel* is "mist" or "vapor." Sure, we could understand the word to mean that everything evaporates, therefore making it all futile. Or we could understand it to mean "vapor" as our own breath is vapor. Translating the word that way gives our *pasuk* a whole new meaning – "Breath breath, all is breath."

Judaism loves life and breathing is, of course, the physiological and symbolic key to living. B'reishit 2:7 tells us that Adam HaRishon only became a living being when HaShem blew into his nostrils *nishmat chayim*.

As we sit in our *sukkot* this holiday season, our thoughts are with our brothers and sisters in Israel. As we consider the relatively flimsy nature of the *sukkah*, we also think about the shelters in which the residents of Sderot spend time waiting for Qassam rockets to fall. We contrast the love of life exhibited by our interpretation of Kohelet with the death cult of the terrorists of Hamas and Hizballah.

Our hope for 5768 is that Israel's enemies will realize the value of human life. We hope that they will put down their weapons and explosives, cease to target innocent civilians, and recognize Israel's right to exist. If they do, they will find a willing partner for peace. ■