

OCTOBER 1, 2007

Parashat B'reishit

Bright Prospects

Vaya'as Elokim et shnei ha'm'orot ha'g'dolim "And God made the two great lights" (Genesis 1:16)

Since the sun is not created until the fourth day of creation – in our *pasuk* – how can the Torah say that God previously created light? Similarly, how can Torah say *va'y'hi erev va'y'hi voker*? Talmud (BT Chagigah 12a) teaches us that the light of those first three days is of a different kind than that which we know. According to the Talmud, after seeing the sinfulness of the generations of the Tower of Bavel and the Flood, God hid this light away from humans and reserved it solely for the righteous in *Olam ha'Bah*.

For better or worse, our actions have an impact on the responses of those around us – as we see from God's reaction to the two wicked generations. It is no less true for parents, business associates, and even our closest friends. We even see it in relations between nations and peoples.

Israel continues to work closely with the new government of Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas to prepare the groundwork for future negotiations on the creation of a Palestinian state and to help improve Palestinian living conditions. Israel has taken concrete steps to support Abbas, including transferring withheld Palestinian tax revenues and approving the release of Palestinian prisoners. In turn, the new PA government should continue to reject rapprochement with Hamas and take further steps to demonstrate its commitment to peace with Israel.

Mahmoud Abbas' government appears ready to do what is necessary to develop a peaceful relationship with Israel. If Abbas continues to carry through on the recent positive steps, the Palestinians will find a willing partner for peace in Israel. ■

Real Repercussions

Lo tochlu mimenu v'lo tig'u bo "You will not eat from it or touch it" (Genesis 3:3)

When describing God's commandment to the *nachash*, why does Chavah add the second prohibition? As we remember from the previous chapter, God commands Adam ha'Rishon not to eat of the tree – but does not include the commandment against touching it. A midrash in Avot d'R. Natan (1:1) explains that Adam merely obeyed the principle of *va'asu s'yag la'Torah* in explaining the rules to Chavah.

Unfortunately, Adam's fence around the law gave the *nachash* just the opening he needed to give the appearance of undermining the credibility of God's commandment. The midrash tells us that the serpent shook the tree and caused its fruit to fall to the ground. When the serpent remained alive, Chavah assumed that the threat of punishment was an idle one.

While most of us try to do the right thing because we know it to be right, there are times when the threat of punishment is useful. And we also know people who will only listen to an authority figure with a demonstrated willingness to use their power to punish.

As Iran continues its illegal, reckless drive for nuclear weapons, the international community must exhaust every economic, diplomatic and political tool to further isolate the regime and increase the economic pressure to persuade Tehran to end its nuclear program. The U.N. Security Council has not acted since Iran missed a May deadline to comply with U.N. Resolution 1747 and suspend its uranium enrichment activities.

Continued delay will only bolster Iran's resolve to continue its nuclear efforts. Failure to act will also further discredit the reputation of the Security Council and weaken its ability to tackle major world issues. If the Council does not act when a nation blatantly violates its demands, it will lose all credibility.

The international community has the power to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons – now it must find the will to use it. ■

Wrong Priorities

Vayichar l'Kayin m'od "And Kayin was very distressed" (Genesis 4:5)

Kayin is upset after God rejects his sacrifice but accepts that of his brother, Avel. In his commentary on this verse, Sforno teaches us that God told Kayin that his reaction was inappropriate. When one can correct a mistake, it is wrong to spend time feeling bad about the past. The appropriate reaction would be to try to make the necessary corrections for the future.

We all know the tragic consequences of Kayin's immature reaction to having his feelings hurt – the first murder. We should learn from Kayin the importance of working to correct our mistakes rather than lashing out.

Since Hamas' takeover of Gaza in June, it has smuggled tons of explosives from Egypt into the territory. Palestinians have fired hundreds of rockets and mortars from Gaza at neighboring Israeli cities – rockets that target Israelis indiscriminately and have even hit Palestinians.

Hamas has also cracked down on free speech and religion and has tried to stop Israeli humanitarian aid from entering the country. Hamas militiamen in late June kidnapped Professor Sana al-Sayegh, dean of the Science and Technology Faculty at Palestine University in Gaza, and reportedly forced her to convert to Islam at gunpoint. Hamas forces have detained employees of several Palestinian newspapers. Palestinian terrorists in July fired at least 11 mortar shells at the Kerem Shalom border crossing, the key entry point for humanitarian goods being trucked from Israel into Gaza.

All of this has gone on while unemployment and poverty in Gaza are at astounding levels. Rather than work to solve the desperation of their people, Hamas instead harnesses this desperation in a never-ending terrorist war against Israel. Imagine the possibilities if the creativity energy used to smuggle explosives were turned to building the Palestinian economy.

Hamas should learn the lesson of Kayin. Rather than focus on murderous hatred, they should turn their energies to self-improvement. ■