

OCTOBER 29, 2007

Parashat Chay'yei Sarah

Sooner the Better

V'ekb'rah meiti milfanai “*That I may remove my dead from before me*” (Genesis 23:4)

The second *pasuk* of our *parashah* reports the death of Sarah *Imeinu*. What follows through the entire first *aliyah* is a detailed report of the transactions Avraham completed to give our matriarch a proper burial.

According to a *baraita* (Ketubot 17a), “The *mitzvot* of welcoming a bride and burying the dead take precedence over the study of Torah.” Of course, Talmud places great weight on the study of Torah yet, in this *baraita*, we see that respect for both the dead and living takes precedence.

Since Israel fully withdrew from Gaza in the summer of 2005, Hamas and other terrorist groups have turned the territory into a terrorist headquarters, planning and launching attacks and using the border with Egypt to smuggle in tons of explosives and weapons. During the past two years, terrorists fired more than 2,000 Qassam rockets into Israel. With support from Iran and Syria, Hamas has also increased the range and efficiency of the rockets, which have been used to target Israeli towns such as Sderot as well as key strategic facilities such as the Rutenberg power plant in Ashkelon, which supplies a quarter of Israel’s electricity.

Hamas and other terrorist groups have used Israel’s evacuated settlements—intended to facilitate Palestinian housing, farming, industry and tourism—to build terrorist training camps. The former settlements along Gaza’s northern border have become launching pads for daily Qassam rocket attacks into Israel. Indeed, since Hamas’ takeover of Gaza in June, more than 1,000 mortar rounds and 500 rockets have struck inside Israel. In September alone, 186 mortal shells and 70 rockets were fired from the territory. In addition to the crude Qassam rockets, terrorists have used more sophisticated weapons, including a longer-range Katyusha rocket fired into Israel in early October.

In our *parashah* we see the great attention Avraham gave to the mitzvah of *kavod hamet* which the Talmud considers to be a primary mitzvah. Unfortunately, in the actions of the Hamas terrorists, we hear a totally contradictory conception of life and death. For Hamas, every Jewish death is to be celebrated rather than regretted, and the sooner they can build up the arsenal to cause those deaths, the better. ■

Hint Hint

Vayishmah Avraham el Efron “*And Avraham heard Efron*” (Genesis 23:16)

In the preceding *pasuk*, Efron says to Avraham, *eretz arbah mei'ot shekel kesef beini u'veinchah mah hi?* Yet, in our *pasuk*, Avraham pays him the money. Why, if Efron is willing to give him the land for free, does he pay for it?

The answer is found in the word *vayishmah*. Rashi interprets Efron's words to mean that, since they are such good friends, Avraham should lay aside his money. And yet, Efron names the price of the land. As Rashbam notes in his commentary, "a hint is sufficient to a wise man." Avraham heard what Efron was really saying – not just the generous face Efron was putting on and not just what Avraham wanted Efron to be saying. Efron wanted to be paid. And a wise man can take a hint.

"Taking a hint" has not been a strong suit of the leaders of Iran. The Islamic Republic continues to violate U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1737 and 1747, which demand that it suspend its nuclear activities. The IAEA Board of Governors' most recent report says that "contrary to the decisions of the Security Council, Iran has not suspended its enrichment related activities" and is now operating close to 2,000 centrifuges at its nuclear facility in Natanz. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claims that Iran is running 3,000 centrifuges—enough to produce fuel for a nuclear weapon. The IAEA report also states that Iran is continuing construction of the heavy water production plant at Arak in direct violation of Resolution 1737. The IAEA report further acknowledges that Iran may possess undeclared nuclear materials and concludes that "the Agency remains unable to verify certain aspects relevant to the scope and nature of Iran's nuclear program."

The world must do more than hint. Iran must face the full force of international sanctions and isolation if we are to succeed in turning Tehran from its dangerous drive toward nuclear weapons. ■

Painful Concessions

Hi Chevron b'Eretz Canaan "Which is Chevron in the Land of Canaan" (Genesis 23:19)

When Avraham buries his wife in *Ma'arat haMachpeilah* we find an interesting geographical description of the location of the cave. Technically, the city of Chevron is in the land of the Plishtim, for that is who administered the land. Torah is correct, of course, that Plishtim was in the larger area of Canaan. But, to be exact, the cave would best be described as being in the Land of Plishtim.

The Ramban explains that in choosing to describe Chevron as part of the larger *Eretz Canaan*, God was pointing out that Chevron was to eventually become part of *Eretz Yisrael*.

In pursuit of peace, Israel has demonstrated her willingness to make painful concessions. Chay'yei Sarah reminds us of how painful these concessions are. Israel's leaders remind us, meanwhile, of the hope inspired by the deep desire for peace.

In his address to the opening of the Knesset's winter session, Prime Minister Olmert said that while Israel faces continuing Palestinian terrorism and threats from Iran, he has "no intention of seeking excuses to avoid a political process," stressing that he is "determined ... to create a momentum and provide a chance for the success of a substantive political process." Olmert also spoke clearly about the need to seize this opportunity and work with Abbas and Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, saying, "We can ... prolong the process, explaining why all this is not possible ... and ... use many good arguments that justify hesitation, to recheck and even to wait. And what will happen if we lose the chance? What will we say if we miss the opportunity?"

While Olmert warned that the process would be difficult—especially in light of continuing threats to Israel—he said it will require "determination to accept brave unavoidable decisions, which involve relinquishing the full realization of the dreams that fed our national ethos for many years." ■