

OCTOBER 8, 2007

Parashat No'ach

Out of Order

V'timalei ha'aretz chamas “*For the land was full of Chamas*” (Genesis 6:11)

In the opening of this week's *parashah* the word *chamas* is repeated as the final straw which led God to call down the flood. Both the Bavli and Yerushalmi understand this term to mean “theft,” an explanation picked up by Rashi, Ibn Ezra and many other classical rabbinic commentators.

While most commentators understand the word *chamas* as being similar to *gezel* – Rashi uses that word in his comment – R. Samson Raphael Hirsch noted that if the Torah meant *gezel*, it would have used *gezel*. The Yerushalmi, however, gives a novel interpretation as to why the thievery of these people was so terrible that it led God to destroy them in the *mabul*. Yerushalmi defines *chamas* as petty theft. It was petty theft - in increments too small to be prosecuted - which led to a complete dissolution of law and order in society and which brought about God's ultimate decree.

Obviously, there is an eerie similarity between the biblical word *chamas* (spelled *chet-mem-samech*) and the terrorist group that now controls Gaza, Hamas (spelled *chet-mem-alef-samech*). But the example of the total dissolution of order is not eerily similar – it is exactly what is happening. Hamas has its very foundations established outside the bounds of order and basic human decency. Leaving aside its most heinous crimes, it has built itself by subverting any semblance of order in Palestinian society.

Hamas fires and allows other groups to fire rockets into Israel. Hamas smuggles weapons and explosives into Gaza. Hamas continues to hold Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit as a prisoner and to deny access to him to international agencies such as the Red Cross. Hamas creates revolting children's television programming using characters like Farfour – a Mickey Mouse look-alike – to teach children to hate Israel and kill Jews. Now that Hamas is in control of Gaza, the group has even cracked down on civil liberties, forced Christians to convert to Islam, destroyed churches, and restricted printing of newspapers.

In Gaza, the land is full of both Hamas and *chamas*. The world must continue to isolate Hamas. ■

Back to the Drawing Board

V'hi'n'ni hashchitam et ha'aretz “*I will destroy them with the earth*” (Genesis 6:13)

Hashem is always thought of as a kind, benevolent God who occasionally punishes human beings. Destroying the world seems to fly in the face of all we know of Hashem whose acts of mercy are recorded throughout the Torah – even when God is angered, love of humanity softens harsh judgment. Why, then, flood the earth and wipe out the people?

Our sages have taught that the *mabul* must be thought of as an act of mercy because God did not suddenly become merciful after the flood. We read in Malachi, “I am God who does not change.” (Malachi 3:6) As Maimonides explains, “God also does not change, for there is nothing that can induce a change in Him.” (Hilchot Yesodie Hatorah 1:11). If God is merciful – as our tradition clearly indicates – then the act of destroying the world must have been merciful. How?

At times situations get so bad that in order to best fix the situation one must wipe out the old plans and start afresh. Some call it “going back to the drawing board.” Either way, such action often requires us to throw away hard work keeping only the lessons we have learned.

As Iran continues to violate U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1737 and 1747, which demand that it suspend its nuclear activities, the world must now consider an even more severe set of sanctions. 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. The IAEA report also states that Iran is continuing construction of the plant at Arak in direct violation of Resolution 1737.

To change Iran’s course, the United States and the international community must exhaust every economic, diplomatic and political tool to further isolate the regime and increase the economic pressure to persuade the government to end its nuclear program. The 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 and will further discredit the reputation of the Council and weaken its ability to tackle major issues. If the Council does not act when a nation blatantly violates its demands, it will lose all credibility.

More robust penalties can still persuade the Iranian regime to suspend its nuclear pursuit. Restrictions on two of the lead sponsors of Iran’s nuclear program—Bank Melli, Iran’s largest state-owned bank, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Iran’s elite military force—would dramatically raise the financial pressure on the regime.

The international community must now go back to the drawing board and demonstrate that it has learned from Iran’s continued defiance. Harsh economic and diplomatic measures must be imposed quickly.

Let us Build

Vayomru hava nivneh lanu ir “And they said, ‘come, let us build a city’” (Genesis 11:4)

Midrash (Pirkei d’R. Eliezer 24) tells us that, when *dor haflagah* were in the midst of building the Tower, the evil influence of the project manifested itself in cruelty and misplaced priorities. When a brick would fall from the high scaffolding, the builders would cry. If a human being fell to his death, however, they would ignore it and continue working.

As the Gazan people continue to suffer with unbelievably high rates of unemployment and continue to live on international food aid and foreign financial assistance, one is forced to wonder what their new overlords from Hamas are doing to alleviate the problem. The answer is that they are making matters worse.

Hamas spends its time, energy, creativity, and money in a bloody “resistance” campaign against Israeli civilians. We are forced to wonder what could be built – by the Palestinians themselves or in peaceful cooperation with Israel – if governing and building were of any interest to the terrorists. Perhaps, one day, they will honestly reach out to Israel in peace. Israel would surely respond, *hava nivneh!* ■

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