

OCTOBER 22, 2007

Parashat Vayeirah

Do Much

V'ekchah pat lechem "And I will get a morsel of bread" (Genesis 18:5)

As the *shloshah anashim* pass Avraham's tent, he exhibits the *mitzvah* of *hachnasat orchim* and invites them to sit, bathe their feet, and let him bring them a little bread. Once they are seated, however, he prepares a feast for them. From this, the Talmud (Bava Metzia 87a) derives the principle that those who are righteous say little and do much.

Avraham didn't spend 20 minutes describing the food he was about to prepare. He didn't brag about how hard he would work or how much money he would spend. He offered a little bread and came back with a great meal. When we are engaged in a righteous act, we should do it because it's right and not because we can draw attention to ourselves by doing it.

Without any fanfare or calling in television cameras, Israel regularly leads the world in offering humanitarian assistance to other countries and peoples – including those technically at war with the Jewish state.

Recently, Israeli doctors screened 40 Iraqi children suffering from heart disease. The doctors said they hoped their work would help improve relations between the two Mideast nations and ease tensions between Israel and the rest of the Arab world. One Israeli doctor remarked, "Our only previous exchanges with the Iraqis are the Scud missiles," referring to the missiles Iraq, under former dictator Saddam Hussein, fired on Israel during the 1991 Gulf War. The Iraqi children ranged in age from a few months to 14 years old.

This latest act of *chesed* occurred just a few months after Israel sent a team of firefighters to Greece to help battle wildfires. While Israel says little about these righteous acts, we can rest assured that the Jewish state does a great deal of good in the world. ■

Wail of Hamas

Ha'k'tza'akatah haba'ah eilai "According to the wailing that has reached me" (Genesis 18:21)

At the start of the episode of the destruction of S'dom and Amorah, HaShem informs Avraham of the plan to destroy these sinful cities. In reference to their evil, God talks about their "wailing." What does the Torah mean by this?

Ibn Ezra offers two possible explanations: First is that the wailing was the sound of heretical outbursts by the residents of these cities. The second explanation is that the wailing was the wail of *hamas*, a word we encountered in Parashat No'ach meaning the pervasive evil caused by disregard to basic, minor norms of decency.

In our time, there is another iteration of Hamas – and the terrorist organization certainly acts in accordance with the evil of its Hebrew namesake. Since Hamas took control of Gaza in June from the Fatah party, the group has continued firing rockets into Israel and smuggling arms and explosives while imposing Islamic law on Gazans. Hamas has also maintained close ties with Iran, and the two have issued statements declaring their desire to see Israel destroyed. If those outrages were not enough, Hamas continues to cooperate with the terrorists holding kidnapped IDF soldier Gilad Shalit.

This is a modern example of the “wail of *hamas*” that Ibn Ezra sees discussed in our *sidra* this week. The international community and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas should maintain their isolation of Hamas until the terrorist group demonstrates its commitment to ending violence and making peace with Israel. ■

Sincere Intentions

Vayitpaleil Avraham el ha'Elokim “And Avraham prayed to God” (Genesis 20:17)

God tells Avimelech in a dream that he is to die for taking Sarah *Imeinu* away from Avraham. God commutes the sentence when Avimelech proclaims that he unknowingly took her, having been told that she was Avraham’s sister. When Avimelech returns Sarah and apologizes, Avraham forgives him and prays on his behalf.

Talmud (Bava Kama 92a) and Rambam, in his commentary on this verse, both cite Avraham’s example as symbolic of our obligation to forgive someone who sincerely seeks our forgiveness for having wronged us. Furthermore, it is considered meritorious (though not required) to forgive someone who has slandered us (Orach Chayim 606:1). Both of these values are indicative of the value our tradition places on peaceful relations between people.

In his recent address to the opening of the Knesset’s winter session, Prime Minister Ehud 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.” Olmert 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?”

Israel continues to negotiate and take steps to help the Palestinians in the face of ongoing terror attacks and increasing strategic threats. As the talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders have intensified, Israeli security forces uncovered and prevented seven plots to carry out suicide attacks in the last six weeks alone, while terrorists in Gaza fired nearly 300 rockets and mortars in September, including a longer-range and more sophisticated Katyusha rocket.

Making peace is not easy and Israel’s enemies are determined to make it even harder. Israel will continue to do everything she can to bring about peace so long as there is a sincere partner on the other side. ■