

DECEMBER 3, 2007

Parashat Mikeitz

Not Yet Lost

U'Pharoh choleim "And Paroh dreamed" (Genesis 41:4)

We are all familiar with Paroh's dreams and what they represent: Egypt was to undergo seven great years of plentiful harvests followed by seven years of devastating famine. Ramban analyzes the dreams and comes to an interesting conclusion - that the years of famine would not only be devastating to the everyday lives of the Egyptians, but they would be so bad as to erase the very memory of the good years. The Egyptians wouldn't be able to remember what it was like to be prosperous and well-fed.

Ramban's commentary teaches us a valuable lesson about the impact of sustained trauma. In addition to the physical toll, there is also a mental and emotional toll. It can blot out memories of normalcy. It can rob people of hope.

Since Israel withdrew completely from Gaza in 2005, Palestinian terrorists have lobbed thousands of rockets at towns and villages in southern Israel – the city of Sderot has been especially hard-hit. The rockets have come to constitute a part of daily life. This past week, at the Annapolis meetings, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, "The continued firing of Qassam rockets against tens of thousands of residents in the south of Israel, particularly in the city of Sderot, serves as a warning – one which cannot be overlooked. The absence of governmental institutes and effective law-enforcement mechanisms, the Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip, the ongoing activity of murderous organizations throughout all the territories of the Palestinian Authority, the absence of a legal system which meets the basic criteria of a democratic government – all these are factors which deter us from moving forward too hastily."

And yet, Israel has not lost hope. While forthrightly insisting that the Palestinians end terrorism and that the Arab states assist Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his government, Olmert said, "I do not ignore all the obstacles which are sure to emerge along the way. They are right in front of me. I came here, despite the concerns and doubts and hesitations, to say to you, President Mahmoud Abbas, and through you, to your people and to the entire Arab world: it is time... We want peace. We demand an end to terror, incitement and hatred. We are willing to make a painful compromise, rife with risks, in order to realize these aspirations."

Despite years of unrelenting terrorism, *od lo avda tikvateinu*. ■

Choosing to Act

Vayishlach Paroh vayikrah et Yosef "So Paroh sent for and called Yosef" (Genesis 41:14)

In this *pasuk*, Yosef is rushed out of prison when Pharaoh learns that he can interpret dreams. After being washed and made presentable, he is thrust before the throne of the ruler of Egypt. In his commentary, the Chafetz Chayim notes

that Yosef is freed with the greatest speed and urgency; once it is the proper time, there is no time to wait. Redemption, we understand, can come at any time.

This week, as we begin celebrating Channukah, we will join together in reciting Al Hanisim. In that prayer, we say *masarta giborim b'yad chalashim, v'rabim b'yad m'atim*. Even though our people were weaker than Antiochus' forces – even though we were fewer in number – still we were able to achieve a miraculous victory.

Though we are an optimistic people, we're not blind. We see the looming threat of a nuclear Iran and we realize the real danger it poses to the world. We know that Iran acts as the main destabilizing force in the Middle East by funding and equipping terrorists. We know that Iran has repeatedly lied to the world about its nuclear program and is in open violation of its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We saw at last week's Annapolis meetings that Arab leaders were very public in their refusal to even shake hands with the Israeli delegation. We know that terrorists' rockets continue to land on Sderot and other communities in southern Israel. We know that Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser, and Eldad Regev are spending yet another *chag* away from their families.

What reason is there still to hope? *Ki masarta giborim b'yad chalashim, v'rabim b'yad m'atim!* But hope only allows us to take the first step. The Maccabees didn't sit back and hope somebody would do something about Antiochus. They acted. And so should we. We must make it clear to our elected officials that the time to respond to Iran by imposing a new, stronger set of sanctions is long since past. We should make certain that the United States always stands strongly beside Israel as she takes risks for peace, and that America continues to insist that the Palestinian government fulfill its obligations to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure and begin building a civil society prepared to live in peace with Israel. These are all issues about which our elected officials need to hear from us.

Redemption can come at any time. And the first step is choosing to act. ■

Time Will Tell

Ha'emet itchem “If the truth be in you” (Genesis 42:16)

After the brothers are accused of being spies, Shimon is taken as collateral while the others return to bring Binyamin. Yosef chooses to test his brothers to see if they are truthful. Why did Yosef need to challenge his brothers and test their faith? Obviously, Yosef had every reason to distrust them – they had thrown him in a pit and sold him into slavery! He also knew that it was possible that deception and violence were an ingrained part of their personas.

Just like Yosef's brothers, Iran has a track record of deceit. It developed a nuclear program in secret for decades, a clear violation of its commitments under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Today, Iran is refusing to stop enriching uranium in defiance of two U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding it do so, and is currently operating 3,000 centrifuges in its nuclear facility at Natanz. Given Iran's limited cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency and ongoing obfuscation, the U.N. Security Council should move forward immediately with a third round of sanctions and the United States and its allies levy economic, political and financial sanctions in order to bring about Iran's compliance.

In the end, Yosef's brothers stuck to their word and, indeed, were truthful in their promises. They were given a test and passed. Iran has been given many tests and opportunities to prove that it can be trusted. So far, it has not risen to the challenge. Only time will tell if *ha'emet it' chem*. ■