

DECEMBER 24, 2007

Parashat Sh'mot

Generational Challenge

Vayamot Yosef, v'chol echav, v'chol hador hahu “*And Yosef died, and all his brothers, and all that generation*”
(Exodus 1:6)

With this *pasuk*, the Torah sets the background for the change in Egyptian attitude toward the Jewish people. Yosef and his brothers were beloved in Egypt. Their deaths allowed for a new approach to the “strangers in their midst.” Ibn Ezra, in his commentary, observes that the Torah designates the generation according to the lives of the great people of the age rather than by a set number of years. Ibn Ezra further states that the ten generations from Adam to Noach might have been longer or shorter than the next ten generations from Noach to Avraham.

Although the Torah generally describes generations by the righteous people of the time, we could just as easily do so by the challenges the righteous of each generation had to overcome. In our time, we have no shortage of challenges, but certainly one of the most daunting is the threat of a nuclear Iran.

Top foreign leaders, Democratic and Republican national security experts, and leading editorial boards from publications as diverse as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* have responded to the recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran with the conclusion that Iran remains a threat which must be thwarted. British Foreign Secretary David Miliband perhaps said it best, “There are three key elements to a nuclear weapon – the fissile material, the missile itself and the process of weaponizing the fissile material for the missile. The US National Intelligence Estimate on Iran’s nuclear program published this week suggests that Iran has put work on the last of these elements on hold. If so, good. But Iran is still pursuing the other two elements, in particular an enrichment program that has no apparent civilian application, but which could produce fissile material for a nuclear weapon, despite demands to stop from the United Nations Security Council and the International Atomic Energy Agency.”

Preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons is a key challenge of our time. Will we be remembered as the generation that allowed the world’s largest state sponsor of terrorism to acquire the deadliest of weapons? Or will we rise to the challenge and work with our elected officials to increase the political and economic pressure on Iran? Failing to confront threats has never worked out well for our people – our generation should act now. ■

Go and See

Vayigdal Moshe, vayeitzei el echav “*And Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers*” (Exodus 2:11)

In the preceding *pasuk*, we are read *vayigdal hayeled va't'vi'eihu l'vat Paroh*. Thus we have two sentences, back-to-back, about Moshe growing up but no information about Moshe’s upbringing from the time he is plucked from the Nile to his killing of the Egyptian. In his commentary on our *pasuk*, Ramban tells us that Moshe was told that he was

a Jew and he went out because he wanted to meet his brothers. Once he leaves the comfortable confines of the palace, though, he discovers the plight of the Israelites – *vayar b'sivlotam*.

It is worth noting, as Ramban does, that Moshe's first instinct upon learning of his lineage is to go to his people. Once he takes this step, it is impossible for him to ignore their plight.

With the secular New Year approaching, it is a time of making resolutions for the coming year. Let us resolve to see and help others to see the suffering of the people of Sderot and other towns and villages in southern Israel who have been the victims of more than 2,000 rocket attacks in 2007. Let us resolve to see and help others to see the suffering of the families of Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser, and Eldad Regev whose families begin another year not knowing the whereabouts or conditions of their loved ones. And let us resolve to see and help others to see the concern and worry of Israelis as they face threats on their northern and southern borders and from the menacing actions of Iran. Let us also remember and vow to strengthen the already strong alliance between the U.S. and Israel.

The first step Moshe took in assuming the leadership of his people is in this *pasuk* – *vayeitzei el echav...vayar b'sivlotam*. ■

Not Consumed

V'ha'sneh einenu uchal “And the bush was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2)

As Moshe encounters HaShem for the first time, it is through the medium of a burning bush. Moshe is baffled and wants to know how the bush is engulfed in flame, but the branches do not burn. The burning bush is very much connected to the future of Am Yisrael. The Chizkuni teaches us that “the enemy is compared to fire and Israel (is compared) to a bush, and just like the fire did not incinerate the bush, so too, the enemy will not be able to annihilate Israel.” Thus far, our history has proven this to be true – “for more than one enemy has risen against us...”

The Chizkuni's words ring true today in the shadows cast across the State of Israel. Despite the focus of early news reports, the new National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) actually reinforces the danger posed by Iran's continuing pursuit of the ability to make nuclear weapons. Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism, remains a threat, vowing to destroy Israel and calling for a world without the United States. Tehran has made significant progress in its ability to enrich uranium—the critical component for nuclear weapons—in direct defiance of multiple U.N Security Council resolutions. The NIE's conclusions that Iran is vulnerable to pressure makes clear that concerted international efforts to impose tough sanctions is the best way to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability.

Iran is still a burning fire with the intention of making the bush disappear. Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and Syria all want the bush to be consumed...and soon. We must work to ensure that our burning bush, Israel, not only survives but thrives in the face of those who wish to destroy her. Just as the fire did not ignite the historical bush of our heritage, so too, the current enemy will not be able to annihilate Israel. Many have tried to annihilate Israel in the past and in the present. Certainly the glow of Israel as a non-consumed bush will shine as a *ner tamid le'olam va'ed*. ■

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