

DECEMBER 31, 2007

Parashat Va'eirah

Ready for Results

Hinei yotzei hamai'mah “As he comes out to the water” (Exodus 7:15)

Moshe is instructed on several occasions in our *parashah* to go and speak to Paroh as the King is going out to the Nile. Why does he not speak to Paroh in the palace? Why must Moshe follow Paroh to the banks of the Nile? Midrash (Sh'mot Rabbah 12:1) teaches us that Paroh, seeing Moshe approaching him, considered avoiding Moshe by staying inside. Moshe seized the opportunity to deliver the message *ba'asher hu sham*. Moshe and Aharon, at the behest of HaShem, were persistent in convincing Paroh to “let my people go.”

Annapolis has opened an opportunity for dialogue between various parties. While we should be encouraged by these meetings, there is still serious work to be done. Prime Minister Fayyad and President Abbas must take significant and serious steps to stop incitement toward Israel, to acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state, to rein in and dismantle the terror infrastructure, and to build the institutions that are the hallmark of democracy and civil society. The Arab World must help the Palestinian Authority (PA) financially while isolating Hamas, and prepare their people for meaningful compromises in the pursuit of peace, and full recognition of Israel as Jewish State.

Furthermore, Egypt must do more to ensure that weapons are not smuggled from Egypt into Gaza. Recently, Senator Arlen Specter called upon Egypt to take responsibility and do more to rein in Hamas and to stop the flow of weapons across the border. Additionally, Egypt has irked the PA Government by allowing Hamas-approved hajj pilgrims to go to Mecca while rejecting those names submitted by the PA. Hamas continues to smuggle weapons in tunnels across the border from Egypt. Israel has targeted militants in Gaza and has been forced to reenter parts of Gaza. Sderot is bombarded on a daily basis by Qassam rockets causing a disruption of normal life

In the case of Moshe Rabbeinu, the fact that he and Paroh chatted is far less important than the message that was delivered – *shalach et ami!* And their conversations meant very little until Paroh absorbed this message. Annapolis was an encouraging step. Now it is time to move beyond encouraging steps and demand results. ■

An Apple a Day

Hebrew “Say to Aaron: take your rod” (Genesis 7:19)

Why does it fall to Aharon to initiate the plague of blood? Especially after HaShem tells Moshe to say to Paroh *hinei anochi makeh bamateh b'yadi*, it seems odd that Moshe would not “do the dirty work” himself. Midrash (Sh'mot Rabbah 9:10) explains that Aharon initiates this plague and the plague of frogs because the water had protected Moshe as an infant. Thus, it would be improper for Moshe to “strike” the water. We further learn from Talmud (Bava Kama 92b) that, “Into the well from which you have drunk, do not throw clods.”

While Chazal are, obviously, making a metaphor about how we should treat people from whom we have derived benefit, the literal meaning should not be ignored. This includes the requirement that we take good physical care of ourselves – we derive obvious benefit from our bodies and should avoid habits and actions that can harm our health. Unfortunately, while a healthy person controls his or her actions, there are diseases that can cause the human body to turn on itself.

Diseases like multiple sclerosis (MS) and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS – also known as “Lou Gehrig’s disease”) are difficult to treat because they are caused by the body attacking its own nervous system. Thankfully, researchers in Israel are making progress to a future solution: they've completed the world's first early stage tests on a promising therapy using stem cells derived from the patient's own bone marrow.

Researchers at Jerusalem’s Hadassah University Hospital extracted stem cells from the hip bone marrow of 26 MS and ALS patients. After a two-month long process, the cells were re-injected into the patients via lumbar puncture. No adverse effects were noted as a result of the therapy, and patients reported improvements in symptoms, leading the way for further developments in forthcoming clinical trials. For both MS and ALS patients, any such news is good news. MS, which affects over 2.5 million people worldwide, causes damage to the body's central nervous system and results in impaired sensory, motor, balance and vision function. The rarer, more rapidly progressing ALS involves a similar degeneration of neuronal cells, causing the gradual and fatal loss of the patient's capacity for movement.

While a cure is not on the immediate horizon, the researchers at Hadassah and elsewhere are hard at work and their efforts give us hope. Hope, as we know, is something the Jewish State knows a lot about. ■

As a Rock

Vayechezak leiv Paroh “*And Paroh’s heart was hardened*” (Exodus 8:15)

In spite of a steady stream of plagues, we are reminded that Paroh’s heart remained hardened. After several plagues, Paroh asks Moshe to pray for him, but will not allow B’nei Yisrael to exit long-term. The Chizkuni teaches us that the plagues followed a pattern “in which two plagues have warning and the third is without warning.” Paroh was given the opportunity to relent and let the Jews go, but he decided to prolong the damage and misery to his people.

Just as Paroh had a hardened heart, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has chosen to harden his heart on numerous occasions, to the detriment of his people. Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and pledged not to develop a nuclear program without strict international oversight. It chose to renege on that agreement. After its illicit nuclear program was discovered, Iran had the opportunity to comply with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections. It chose not to. When it was twice sanctioned by the U.N. Security Council and ordered to cease uranium enrichment, Iran had the opportunity to do so. It chose not to. Iran chooses to continue enriching uranium. Iran chooses to continue develop missile technologies that would allow it to deliver a nuclear warhead. Iran chooses continue to sponsor acts of terrorism against U.S. troops and, by its proxies in Hizballah and Hamas, against Israelis.

Paroh eventually caves in and allows B’nei Yisrael to leave, but only after inflecting pain and suffering upon his own people. Imposing additional biting sanctions on Iran is the best way to persuade Tehran to cease its uranium enrichment activity and to ensure that Iran never is allowed to acquire nuclear weapons or the capacity to make them. As the recently released National Intelligence Estimate on Iran says, the imposition of pressure has worked in the past and is our best bet to convince Ahmadinejad to soften his heart and help his people. ■