

JANUARY 7, 2008

Parashat Bo

Living Memory

V'hayah hayom hazeh lachem l'zikaron "And this day will be for you a memorial" (Exodus 12:14)

Several times in our *parashah*, we are commanded to remember the exodus from Egypt. *Yitzi'at Mitzrayim* is to be remembered eternally as a pivotal event in the life of the Jewish people. Rashi, quoting the Mechilta, teaches us that "a day that is a memory *to you*, you shall celebrate and observe." For this reason, the Exodus from Egypt is remembered in word every day and is commemorated in action at the Pesach Seder – *b'chol dor va'dor chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatzah mi Mitzrayim*.

It is not enough that we remember. It is not enough that we read the passages of the Torah. We must see ourselves as if we, personally, have come out of Egypt. We must emotionally connect with our people's past. We must live out their experiences by celebrating the Seder and eating *matzot*.

Last fall, sociologists Steven M. Cohen and Ari Kelman published a disheartening paper concerning American Jewish feelings towards Israel. They indicate that not only are young Jews not attached to Israel, but 52% would not regard Israel's destruction as a "personal tragedy." Additionally, only about 50% of those under 35 are "comfortable with the idea of a Jewish State." These statistics should not only alarm us, but should strengthen our resolve to take action on behalf of the U.S.-Israel relationship. The friendship between these two countries is critical now more than ever. As President Bush embarks on his Middle East tour, we are reminded that the region's most stable nation and lone liberal democracy is an increasingly vital asset for the United States. The President's trip represents a historic reaffirmation of America's unbreakable bond with the Jewish State.

As our *parashah* teaches us, it is incumbent upon each of us to live out and emotionally connect with our people *b'chol dor vador*. As vital to both countries as the U.S.-Israel relationship is, we should act in our Jewish and patriotic interests and work to ensure in perpetuity this already-strong alliance. ■

Do As I Do

Vayeilchu vaya'asu B'nei Yisrael ka'asher tzivah HaShem et Moshe v'Aharon kein asu "And B'nei Yisrael went and did that which HaShem commanded Moshe and Aharon, they did so" (Exodus 12:26)

As B'nei Yisrael carry out the first *korban Pesach*, why does our *pasuk* begin and end with seemingly repetitious phrases. Isn't *kein asu* at the end of the *pasuk* extraneous? While we might think that the last words of this verse refer to B'nei Yisrael, Rashi tells us that it refers to Moshe and Aharon. In other words, the Torah wants to make explicit that Israel's leaders fulfilled the *mitzvot* alongside the people.

We all know about leaders who are of the “do as I say, not as I do” variety. Typically, these people lack the moral authority necessary to make difficult decisions. Thankfully, with all of the challenges that lie ahead, Moshe and Aharon are not only exemplars for B’nei Yisrael to follow, they demonstrate that the law applies to everyone.

Unfortunately, the opposite situation is occurring in Gaza. The leaders of the Hamas terrorist organization that took over Gaza in a coup last summer have created a lawless terrorist state where the only rule is that of the gun. Weapons and explosives are smuggled with ease through tunnels under the Egypt-Gaza border and more advanced weapons are beginning to be used by Palestinian terrorists: a state-of-the-art RPG recently penetrated the armor of an Israeli merkava tank and, last week, an upgraded rocket called a Grad-Katyusha landed in the southern part of the city of Ashkelon – demonstrating that almost 200,000 more Israeli homes are now within range of Palestinian rockets. As has become all-too-common, daily rocket barrages continue to pound the town of Sderot.

All of this preparation for a terrorist war goes on as the Hamas leadership pays no attention to the Gazan economy, puts no money into the Gazan infrastructure, and applies no creativity to solving Gaza’s massive problems. Hamas continues to hold kidnapped IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. Truly, there is no law in Gaza – accept for the squads of armed gunmen roaming the streets.

The world must continue to isolate Hamas until it recognizes Israel’s right to exist, renounces terrorism, and agrees to abide by past Israeli-Palestinian agreements. In Gaza, the only law that applies is whatever helps Hamas shed more blood – and that law helps no one. ■

In the End

K’daberchem “As you speak” (Exodus 12:31)

Upon the conclusion of the ten plagues, Paroh commands that the Jews be banished from his kingdom. Invoking the command form of the verb, Paroh relents and angrily tells Moshe and Aharon, “get up and go from the midst of my nation.” Paroh then insists that they go worship their God “as you have said.” Rashi interprets this to mean that Paroh is actually saying, “everything is as you said, and not like I said.”

In the end, Paroh’s hardened heart and refusal to negotiate did nothing but hurt his people – and, in the end, he had to admit it.

The Middle East peace process is at a crossroads. Israel has done its part and has already made difficult concessions for peace. Now is the time for the Palestinian Authority (PA) to fulfill its obligations. The PA must stop incitement against Israel, recognize Israel as a Jewish State, and take concrete steps to dismantle the terror infrastructure. It must crack down and punish the two terrorists who killed two Israeli hikers last week – one of the terrorists is a member of the PA security services. The PA must demonstrate that terrorism will not result in a revolving prison door and that it can establish a working judicial system. Furthermore, the Arab states must contribute to the economic viability of the PA’s democratic institutions and must contribute to the diplomatic viability of the peace process by normalizing relations with Israel. Both the PA and the Arab States must ensure that Hamas is not allowed to rule the day.

Peace negotiation requires dialogue and *shakla ve’tarya*. Prime Minister Fayyad and President Abbas must decide whether they are true partners for peace or whether they are like Paroh, who hardened his heart and hardened the lives of his people. ■