

FEBRUARY 11, 2008

Parashat Tetzaveh

Careful What You Wish For

V'atah t'tzaveh et B'nei Yisrael "You shall command B'nei Yisrael" (Exodus 27:20)

Since his birth, chronicled in Exodus 2:2, Moshe Rabbeinu has been the central figure of the Torah – until this week. Moshe's name does not appear in our *parashah* despite the significant number of *mitzvot* contained in the portion. Where did Moshe go? According to the Zohar (Midrash Ha'Ne'elam Shiur HaShirim Ma'amar 4), Moshe's name was erased by God after the incident of the *egel hazahav*. In next week's *parashah*, Moshe responds to HaShem's decision to destroy all of B'nei Yisrael by saying *m'cheini nah misif'r'chah asher katavtah*. According to the Zohar, God chose our *parashah*, which precedes the story of the *egel*, to do just that. Moshe's name is erased.

While there are many lessons one can draw from Moshe's actions during the incident of the golden calf, one simple, obvious one is to be careful what you wish for – you just might get it!

Not only did Hamas wish for power in the Palestinian government, it forced its way into absolute power in Gaza by violently overthrowing the Palestinian Authority last summer. Unfortunately for the terrorists of Hamas, governing is more than turning your territory into an armed camp. A real government works to improve the lives of its citizens; under Hamas, the already desperate condition of Gazans has significantly deteriorated – unemployment is over 80% and the vast majority of people rely on international food aid to feed themselves and their families. A real government seeks to bring in new jobs and new investment; all Hamas tries to bring into Gaza are weapons and explosives. A real government deals with its neighbors; Hamas continues to refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist.

Moshe's name reappears, of course, in Torah and he goes on to be our greatest leader and prophet – *lo kam b'Yisrael k'Moshe od*. If only the leaders of Hamas could muster a fraction of the greatness that was in Moshe. If only they could renounce terrorism, promise to abide by previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements, and recognize Israel's right to exist, both peoples could come to live in peace. ■

Eyes on the Ball

L'chavod u'P'tifaret "For honor and glory" (Exodus 28:2)

Just as last week's *parashah* gave a tremendous amount of information about the construction of the ark, this week's goes into great detail about the clothing of the High Priest. The *Kohein Gadol* was the most respected of the *kohanim*. He served in the Beit Hamikdash every day of the year. Befitting a man of his position, in addition to the four unique garments every *kohein* wore, the *Kohein Gadol* wore four more garments. The Or HaChayim, however, noted that the garments did not serve to glorify and dignify the High Priest. Rather, the priest's clothing represents the glory of God.

A rather obvious lesson: clothes may make the man, but the man isn't what's most important!

For all the focus placed on the outrageous statements and opinions of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, we need to remember that Iran's illegal pursuit of nuclear weapons began before his term and will, unless stopped, continue after he leaves office. For a moment, forget about Ahmadinejad's crazy rantings about wiping Israel off the map, a world without Zionism, and the denial of the Holocaust.

For more than twenty years, well before Ahmadinejad became President, Iran had a covert uranium enrichment program that it hid from inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency – a clear violation of Iran's obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. According to the recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), Iran had a nuclear weapons program until 2003 when it was shut down to avoid international pressure. Ahmadinejad took office in 2005. We know, and Tehran has admitted, that Iran has made significant progress in enriching uranium – the key component in weaponization – despite two U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding Iran cease such activity. Iran remains a threat to world peace and will remain as such until it makes the decision to cease uranium enrichment and discontinue any plans for a nuclear weapon.

In the time of the Temple, the people were meant to look at the glorious clothing of the High Priest and see the splendor of HaShem. In our day, we, too need to look past one man and focus our energies on preventing a dangerous nation from obtaining dangerous weapons. ■

All Heart

V'hayu al leiv Aharon “Thus they will be over Aharon's heart” (Exodus 28:30)

In our *parashah*, we are presented with a detailed description of the clothing of the High Priest. Aside from the regular clothes that all *kohanim* wear, Aharon was commanded to wear a *choshen* with the *urim and tumim*. Indeed, we are told in previous *p'sukim* that the *choshen* must be placed on top of the *efod*. So what is the purpose of this *pasuk*? Sforno and Abarbanel both teach us that the phrase *al libo* goes beyond the physical and into the spiritual. According to Abarbanel, the purpose of *al libo* is to instruct us that “Aharon shall constantly remember *B'nei Yisrael* in his thought(s) and in his prayers.”

As opposed to Paroh, whose heart was hardened, Aharon had a caring and compassionate heart for all of *B'nei Yisrael*. Every decision was, literally and figuratively, *al libo*. Aharon had to always have the people foremost in his thoughts, his prayers and his actions.

In making any decision, Israel always weighs the implications and affects on her people. First and foremost, Israel must be able to defend herself and her citizens against attack. The people in Sderot are under constant bombardment from Qassam rockets launched by Hamas and are suffering physically and mentally after months of attack. In response, the U.S. House is considering a resolution introduced by Reps. Scott Garrett (R-NJ), Eliot Engel (D-NY), Jeb Hensarling (R-TX) and Shelley Berkley (D-NV) that clearly lays blame for rocket attacks on Hamas and Islamic Jihad and their patrons, Iran and Syria, and calls on Egypt to take “affirmative, transparent, verifiable steps to stop the flow of rockets and other terrorism-enabling materials (including human resources) to the Palestinian territories.”

Like Aharon, today's leaders of Israel make decisions with a heart and have empathy that comes from the heart. Nonetheless, any country – Israel included – must regard the security of its citizens as paramount. ■