

OCTOBER 27, 2008

Parashat Noah

Hiding in the Ark

Tamim hayah b'dorotav – “He was righteous in his generation” (Genesis 6:9)

Rashi (on verse 9) notes that when referring to Noah, the phrase “in his generation” can be read as positive – that he was righteous despite the depravity of his times. However, we can also read the phrase negatively. “According to his generation he was righteous, but if he lived in the generation of Abraham he would not have been considered anything!” (see Talmud Sanhedrin 108a) How does the Talmud derive such a harsh comment from a seemingly complementary phrase? Rabbi Simchah Raz (see Shivim Panim L'torah – Bereishit page 48) explains that at times it is better to be a wise, intelligent *tzaddik* than a pure *tzaddik*. Noah, witnessing the violence, theft and general corruption of society builds an ark and saves himself. Abraham on the other hand traverses the world bringing a message of spirituality and peace. Indeed, we see that despite the more than one hundred years that it took him to build the ark, Noah failed to convince even a single person to repent and join him on the vessel.

The Talmud criticizes Noah for his lack of concern about the rest of the world. Thus, we learn that we cannot consider ourselves truly righteous until we learn to care for other's interests as well as our own. Today, it is this very apathy towards others that leads certain nations to hamper international efforts to stymie Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

Because of foot-dragging on the part of China and Russia the United Nations has failed to impose a fourth round of ever-harsher economic sanctions on Iran for its continued nuclear development and research. These countries have placed their own narrow concerns ahead of the safety and well-being of the international community. For this reason the United States and her European allies are looking to form a “coalition of the concerned” to impose sanctions on Iran outside of the U.N. in order to sidestep Russian and Chinese stonewalling. In fact, Germany recently announced plans to impose its own national sanctions limiting business contacts with Iran. Combined with the recent drop in oil prices, Iranian citizens are feeling the effects of these sanctions and putting pressure on the Iranian government, according to a Los Angeles Times report. “Not only is its budget heavily dependent on revenue from oil exports, but international sanctions have exacerbated the economy's weaknesses.”

More countries must make a concerted effort to join this “coalition of the concerned.” They must learn the lesson of Noah, that they cannot favor their own limited interests over international peace. If they, like Noah, choose to build an ark around themselves and hide from the growing threat of Iran, they should not be surprised when, like the flood, an Iranian nuclear capability threatens the interests of all nations. ■

Abuse of Women (Past and Present)

Vatimalei ha'aretz chamas... – “and the earth was filled with destruction” (Genesis 6:11)

The Torah, in describing the moral degradation that prompts God to destroy the world, tells us that humanity filled the world with *chamas* (an irony not lost on those familiar with Middle Eastern terrorist organizations). What does this cryptic word refer to? The Midrash suggests that it refers to theft, and especially the theft of small items

unrecoverable through the courts, suggesting a systematic societal corruption. Yet, Ibn Ezra (on verse 11) adds that *chamas* also refers to the crime of, “taking of women by force.” By describing *chamas* as the abuse of women Ibn Ezra alludes to rape, forced marriage and the general oppression of women, ills that certainly continue to this day.

However, even Ibn Ezra could not have foreseen a different, more heinous use of women aimed at an even more terrible form of destruction. According to a new BBC report, Islamic Jihad terrorists are recruiting and training young female Palestinians as suicide bombers in the Gaza Strip.

“We were created to become martyrs for God,” said one 18-year old female who said she was waiting, for the Egyptian-brokered calm between Israel and Hamas to come to an end, before attacking the Jewish state. “If we just throw stones at the Jews they get scared. Imagine what happens when body parts fly at them.” She added that Israeli children would be a certain target. Israel accuses the Palestinian leadership of manipulating young women like this and training them to kill themselves to advance the Palestinian cause. Women have generally found greater success in their destructive aims than men because Israeli security forces take extra caution to preserve the dignity of these women as they pass through checkpoints. Tragically, these efforts of Islamic Jihad to indoctrinate women makes daily life that much more difficult for every other Palestinian woman who must be screened for security purposes.

According to the Torah, cynical and self-destructive abuse of women brought the wrath of God during biblical times. Today we witness a sadistically magnified abuse of women which not only destroys these women, and their innocent victims, but also threatens to hamper peace initiatives and other efforts to ease restrictions on the daily lives of innocent Palestinians. Islamic Jihad must abandon this heinous form of *chamas* and stop destroying the lives of women it claims to honor and protect. ■

The Peace of the Olive Branch

V'hinei alei zayit taraf b'fiyha – “and lo in her mouth an olive-leaf freshly plucked” (Genesis 8:11)

Ever since biblical times the olive branch, a symbol emanating from our *parashah*, has represented peace. At the conclusion of the flood Noah learns that the waters have receded from a dove who returns from her flight with an olive branch in her beak. Noah understands that the olive branch signifies the return of vegetation to the world which allows Noah to leave the ark. The icon of a dove holding a branch of olives has been accepted as a universal symbol of peace, referring to man's newfound peace with God and his ability to re-inhabit the earth with God's blessing.

However, this year the olive branch seems not to denote peace but rather discord. Each year, in the fall, Palestinian olive growers gather thousands of workers for the October harvest. Tragically, these harvests have raised tensions between Palestinian farmers and Israeli settlers who are bent on disrupting their efforts.

This year, as in years past, Israeli forces have deployed to protect the Palestinian farmers and ensure their right to a peaceful harvest. While minor incidents of violence again flared up last week, “Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said the army is making a major effort to protect the olive pickers and denounced those attacking farmers as hooligans,” the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. An IDF soldier was also injured during a scuffle. It is significant to note that Israel is committed to protecting the rights of all of her citizens, regardless of race or religion, and has allocated resources for the protection of these olive growers. While every effort must continue to be made to cease these attacks immediately some comfort may be found in Israel's determination to stand up to Jewish impropriety. Once again Israel is demonstrating the country's commitment to peace with the Palestinian people.

The recent efforts of the Israeli government, and Israeli security forces, to defend Palestinian farmers brings the potential for peace and prosperity in the future. Israel remains committed to defending the rights of her citizens whether Arab olive growers or Jews living in Sderot. Hopefully, with continued efforts like these, olive branches will again soon become symbols of peace, prosperity and coexistence. ■