

OCTOBER 12, 2009

Parashat Bereishit

Building the World

Vayivra elokim et ha'adam b'tzalmo -- "And God created man in His image" (Genesis 1:27)

What does the Torah mean when it states that God created man “in His image?” The Zohar (in the addendum known as the Zohar Chadash) offered a parable: A king who ruled over his country constructed numerous aspects of a large city. One day he called the city inhabitants together and appointed one of them as his minister. He told them, “Until now, I have toiled in building the city’s great structures. From now on, you must act like me.” According to the Zohar, this is what God told man: “Until now, I have built the ‘city’ and everything in it. But now, you must build and do the work of the world.” Thus, the Torah teaches us that we truly act in the image of the Almighty when we harness our knowledge and ability to improve the world.

An Israeli research scientist has taken great efforts to live up to this standard of improving the world, and was recently rewarded with a Nobel Prize in chemistry.

Professor Ada Yonath, head researcher in the field of structural biology and biochemistry at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, is a pioneer of ribosome crystallography. Her research, which has revealed the modes of action of over 20 different antibiotics that target bacterial ribosomes, has enabled her to identify how bacteria become resistant to antibiotics. Bacterial resistance is a problem of great concern worldwide, especially in light of the growth of antibiotic resistant super bugs. Her studies lay the groundwork for scientists to start developing new bacteria-resistant antibiotics that better target the ribosomes of pathogens to avoid the problem of resistance.

Interestingly, the end of verse 27 notes that *zachar u'nekeivah* – both male and female were created and that both genders were instructed to imitate God by continuing to construct the world. As Yonath told Israel21c.org, “Women make up half the population...I think the population is losing half of the human brain power by not encouraging women to go into the sciences. Women can do great things if they are encouraged to do so.”

Israeli scientists continue to develop innovations which make our world a better place. In doing so, they are truly acting in the Torah’s description of “God’s image,” and using their knowledge and expertise to build the world. ■

Forms of Protection

Vayikach Hashem elokim et ha'adam - "And the Lord God took the man" (Genesis 2:15)

Following Adam and Eve’s ejection from the Garden of Eden, the entrance to the garden was protected by two different objects: the *cherubim* and a “flaming sword which turned every way.” What did these two items represent and why were they both necessary? We recognize the *cherubim* from their later appearance in the Tabernacle – where they spread their wings over the Ark of the Covenant. According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the *cherubim* “appear as the bearers of the Glory of God revealing itself to mankind.” They stood at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to peacefully and lovingly warn would-be intruders to withdraw. In contrast, the sword of punishment was placed to remind intruders of the negative consequences of attempting to enter the garden if they ignored the *cherubim*.

In its efforts to halt Iran's nuclear aspirations the United States is using a similar approach to the one which the Torah describes to prevent trespassers in the Garden of Eden. Like the *cherubim* and sword, the administration is using engagement backed by the threat of sanctions to convince Iran to live up to its international obligations.

While President Barack Obama called recent nuclear talks with Iran a "constructive beginning," he challenged Tehran to match words with deeds, the Associated Press reports. "Talk is no substitute for action...The United States will not continue to negotiate indefinitely and we are prepared to move toward increased pressure." President Obama also said that Iran must meet its obligations under United Nations Security Council resolutions which call on Iran to stop enriching uranium, and stated that Iran must grant international inspectors "unfettered access" to a secret nuclear facility on an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps base. At the same time, leading Democratic senators urged the Obama administration to press ahead with new sanctions on Iran, The Wall Street Journal reports. "We should continue talks with the Iranians, but we should not trust them," Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) said during a hearing of the Senate Banking Committee. "The threat of new sanctions will only serve to strengthen the president's hand as we pursue a diplomatic solution." For more on potential sanctions against Iran, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

Like the dangling sword that stood at the ready to protect the Garden of Eden, America must be willing to use the coercive force of powerful economic sanctions. As the administration attempts to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear pursuits through talks, they must also be prepared to impose such sanctions if talks prove to be ineffective. ■

An Ancient Excuse for Violence

Vayehi bihiyotam basadeh - "And it came to pass, when they were in the field" (Genesis 4:8)

As the debate between Cain and Abel represented not only the world's first argument but also history's first murder, the topic of their disagreement carries great weight. What did the world's first brothers fight about? Among the suggestions offered in the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 22), "Rabbi Yehudah D'siknin in the name of Reish Lakish said: This one claimed that the Temple would be built in his border, and this one claimed that the Temple would be built in his border, as it is written, 'And it came to pass, when they were in the field,' and the term 'field' can only refer to the Temple, as it is written (Micah 3:12) 'shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field.' In this context, Cain rose up [and murdered Abel]." Therefore, according to Rabbi Yehudah, Cain murdered his brother during a disagreement over who would control the world's holiest place, the Temple Mount.

Just as Cain resorted to bloodshed during a feud over the Temple Mount, Palestinians have used the Temple Mount in recent weeks as a rallying point to encourage violence.

Over the Sukkot holiday, as thousands of Jews flocked to the Old City for the traditional *birkat kohanim* at the Western Wall, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told Yemen's state-run TV that "The Palestinians are fighting 'tooth and nail' to defend al-Aqsa [the Temple Mount], but this needs great Arab and Islamic efforts," Reuters reports. During the holiday, actual fighting did erupt around the Temple Mount and an Israel Defense Forces soldier was stabbed in the neck. Further, plans were underway for the stoning of worshippers below the Temple Mount at the Wailing Wall before being thwarted by Jerusalem District Police, who succeeded in uncovering a number of wheelbarrows next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque which were filled with stones and cinder blocks. This incitement follows a month of hard work by the Israeli police to ensure peaceful prayers on the Temple Mount during the month of Ramadan. Such religious tolerance is a continuation of Israel's policy to share the Temple Mount. The policy originated in 1967 when then-Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, upon reuniting the city of Jerusalem, permitted the Islamic authority, also known as the Waqf, to continue its civil authority on the Temple Mount.

Instead of following the lead of Abel and looking for peaceful coexistence, Arab leaders seem more interested in imitating Cain. However, the Temple Mount, considered by many to be the holiest place on earth, should never be used as an excuse to foment violence and unrest. ■