

SEPTEMBER 26, 2011

Parashat Ha'azinu – Shabbat Shuvah

Foolish Stubbornness

A generation crooked and perverse (Deuteronomy 32:5)

דור עקש ופתלתל (דברים לב:ה)

Referring to a future time when the Jewish people would abandon the Torah, Moses described a generation that is *ikkesh* and *p'taltol*, normally explained to mean “crooked and perverse.” Yet, while *ikkesh* clearly means “crooked” or “bent,” *p'taltol* is more difficult to translate. Rashi explains that the word emanates from a *p'til*—a wick tied in a winding, circuitous manner—making *p'taltol* a synonym for “twisted.” However, Ibn Ezra argues that the word means “determined and uncompromising in...stubbornness.” Therefore, according to this view, *p'taltol* is not just a stubborn generation, but rather, a generation that takes stubbornness to a new level, refusing any suggestion of compromise or change.

Moses used the word *p'taltol* to indicate a generation so stubborn that it is hard for us to comprehend. Of course, looking at the current Palestinian leadership, who refuse to drop their preconditions and sit down at the negotiating table with Israel, we get a good idea of their resolute intransigence.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, seeking to secure recognition of a Palestinian state outside the context of negotiations with Israel, recently submitted an official bid for Palestinian statehood at the United Nations. If Abbas is serious about peace, he must recognize that it will not be achieved through U.N. declarations or General Assembly [anti-Israel tirades](#). In fact, the Palestinian unilateral declaration is in [clear violation of the Oslo Accords](#) and other treaties the Palestinians have signed with Israel, it jeopardizes the prospects for peace, and damages trust between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as between the United States and the Palestinians. Put simply, this action will not lead to peace, which will only occur through direct talks. Yet, the PA does not seem interested in negotiations at all. As [The Jerusalem Post](#) reports, following the application submission, “Israel responded positively...and the Palestinians negatively, to a formula for restarting negotiations issued by the Quartet [the U.S., E.U., U.N. and Russia] that would place a December 2012 deadline on reaching an agreement.” For more on the Palestinian statehood bid, click [here](#).

Like the future generation that was described as *p'taltol*, the Palestinian Authority has rebuffed all efforts aimed at achieving compromise. Unfortunately for those seeking an end to the conflict, its stubbornness in refusing to negotiate will keep peace put of our grasp. ■

Past and Future

Remember the days of old (Deuteronomy 32:7)

זכר ימות עולם (דברים לב:ז)

According to Rashi, the destruction described in our *parashah* refers both to earlier sins and expected treachery—representing a reminder of the past as well as a caution about the future. After noting that the sages in the Midrash interpreted the text as a warning, Rashi (on 32:12) applies the lesson to future generations: “But I believe that these are words of rebuke...and they will not remember the former things which [God] did for them nor future things which [God] is destined to do for them. Therefore it is necessary to interpret this in reference to [the past] and [the future].”

In reminding us to look back carefully in order to properly prepare for the future, Rashi cautions us to ensure that we do not repeat past mistakes. With this lesson in mind, we must take Iran's frightening nuclear aspirations seriously.

In a recent [address](#) to the U.N. General Assembly, President Obama said, "Let's be honest: Israel is surrounded by neighbors that have waged repeated wars against it. Israel's citizens have been killed by rockets fired at their houses and suicide bombs on their buses. Israel's children come of age knowing that throughout the region, other children are taught to hate them. Israel, a small country of less than eight million people, looks out at a world where leaders of much larger nations threaten to wipe it off of the map. The Jewish people carry the burden of centuries of exile, persecution, and the fresh memory of knowing that six million people were killed simply because of who they were."

For all of these reasons, Israel is forced to take the Iranian threat to wipe the Jewish state "off of the map" seriously. Iran is nearing a tipping point in its illicit and aggressive quest for a nuclear weapons capability, according to a new International Atomic Energy Agency report. Moreover, Tehran's brutally repressive regime has dramatically enhanced its ability to produce nuclear weapons material. America must work ardently to focus attention on this dangerous development and the need for immediate, vigorous international action to thwart Iran's nuclear weapons program. For more information on Iran, view AIPAC's latest [memo](#) or visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Rashi reminds us that we must look to the past to properly appreciate the very real dangers looming in the not-so-distant future. Given the Jewish peoples' recent history, we have no choice but to be vigilant about the threat of a nuclear Iran. ■

The "Charity" of Rain (Haftarah Shabbat Shuvah)

God gives you the early rain in just measure (Joel 2:23)

כי נתן לכם את המורה לצדקה (יואל ב:כג)

Prophesying a future era when the Jewish people would return to the Land of Israel, the prophet Joel told of a time when God would redeem the Jewish nation and bring blessings to the Land. Among the blessings, Joel stated that God would bring abundant rain, *litzedakah*—literally meaning "in just measure." However, the word *tzedakah* also implies kindness and charity. In fact, Metzudat David (on 2:23) explains that the rains would represent a gift from God to the people, "for God would bestow the rain as *tzedakah* and not only if it was earned [through proper behavior]." This rain represented the greatest possible charity, allowing the nation to produce the food it needed to survive and prosper.

The description of rain as charity highlights the critical importance of sustainable food development. In our times, by sharing her technological prowess in crop irrigation with farmers in Africa, Israel is brining new meaning to this ancient *tzedakah*.

In Senegal, situated in the drought-prone Sahelian region, where rainfall is irregular and the soil poor in nutrients, about 75 percent of the working population is engaged in farming, and a majority of these farms are dependent on rain. Now, to help these farmers, the Israeli Foreign Ministry's MASHAV, the Agency for International Development Cooperation, developed Tipa, a program designed to transfer Israeli drip-irrigation water technology to remote areas in Senegal lacking basic amenities including electricity. The Israeli Foreign Ministry [reports](#) that the "solution, based on easy-to-install drip irrigation systems and an economic model, is becoming so wildly successful that towns and villages beyond the perimeters of the Israeli projects are copying them," says Ilan Fluss, Director of MASHAV'S Planning and External Relations Department. "We can already see that around those communities where we are working, people are copying this model independently," reports Fluss, who estimates that the Israeli intervention has directly impacted about 700 Senegalese families.

During the Ten Days of Repentance we focus on the critical elements of atonement and renewal that charity represents. Through its Tipa program, Israel not only makes charity a national project, it also gives new meaning to the ancient prophet's promise to bring "rain of charity" to the Holy Land. ■

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