

OCTOBER 24, 2011

Parashat Noah

A Corrupt Culture

And the earth was filled with violence (Genesis 6:11)

ותמלא הארץ חמס (בראשית ו:יא)

Describing the generation of the flood, the Torah tells us that the world was “filled with *hamas*” (6:11). What is the meaning of this unusual word? Rashi (on 6:11) translates the word to mean “theft.” Yet, the Midrash (Midrash Rabbah 6) notes that the word *hamas* in the Torah refers to “idolatry...sexual impropriety...[and] murder,” based on the verse in Jonah (3:8) which notes that the people of Nineveh repented, “from the violence (*Hamas*) that is in their hands.” Radak (on Jonah 3:8) explains that *hamas*, “corresponds to all [types of sin], for which the [people of Nineveh] were decreed destruction.” Therefore, in describing the world as “filled with *hamas*,” the Torah tells us that society had been corrupted at its core, guided by an attitude which promoted and extolled sinful behavior.

When Israel freed over one thousand terrorists in exchange for kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, the world watched Palestinians display a culture corrupted by what the bible described as *hamas*, as they celebrated the return of convicted terrorists responsible for the deaths of hundreds of innocent civilians.

Following the exchange of Gilad Shalit for hundreds of Palestinians convicted of violence against Israel, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said that, “I would like to believe that this will permit the taking up again of discussions [between Israel and the Palestinians.]” Yet, instead of using the agreement as an opportunity for increased peace and cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians, Hamas leaders vowed to continue its attacks against Israel. [The New York Times](#) reported that, “Just off the bus in Gaza after six years in an Israeli prison, one of hundreds traded to Hamas for an Israeli soldier, Wafa al-Bass declared her next goal: abduct more Israeli soldiers.” According to [The Washington Post](#), “a spokesman for Hamas’ military arm suggested that the group would continue to seek opportunities to seize Israeli soldiers.” When thousands of Palestinians gathered in the West Bank to celebrate the release of 477 prisoners, in the first stage of the Gilad Shalit exchange, “chants of ‘The people want a new Shalit,’ could be heard in Ramallah as Hamas and Fatah supporters waved flags together,” [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported.

In its description of humanity before the flood, the Torah depicts the world as “filled with *hamas*,” connoting a society rotted at its core, which lauded violence. If peace is ever going to be achieved in the Middle East, the Palestinians must reject this *hamas*-like mentality. ■

Protecting the Animal Kingdom

Of every living thing of all flesh (Genesis 6:19)

ומכל החי מכל בשר (בראשית ו:יט)

God commanded Noah to save his family and the animal kingdom, telling him, “of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shall you bring into the ark, to keep them alive with you” (Genesis 6:19). Yet, according to the Midrash, Noah saw the divine command as an imperative to preserve all forms of life for the future. “Rabbi Levi said, [Noah] brought with him [into the ark] twigs of vines, buds of figs and shoots of olives” (Bereishit Rabbah Noah 14:1). Noah treated God’s commandment to save the animals not as a specific instruction, but rather an injunction to preserve all of the natural life fundamental to a thriving environment.

Today, an Israeli initiative is following Noah's example, literally rescuing animals from the threat of extinction. In the 1960s, Uri Tzon and Avraham Yoffe organized the Hai-Bar Yotvata Nature Reserve to both reintroduce the types of wild animals that had become extinct in Israel as well as to help reinforce populations of endangered species. The reserve has developed successful breeding programs for a number of native Israeli wild animals including the Persian fallow deer, the Asian wild donkey and the white oryx. Around 1993, the late General Avraham Yoffe, the first director of Israel's Nature and Parks Authority, mounted an effort at Hai Bar Yotvata to save the Saharan scimitar-horned oryx, an African antelope species classified extinct in the wild, the website [Israel21c](#) reported. "The hot, dry weather near Eilat proved perfect for breeding African wildlife, and in 2003, eight Saharan antelope from Hai Bar Yotvata were reintroduced to the wild at Guembeul Fauna Reserve in northwestern Senegal, a nature reserve devoted to animal diversity." Now, almost a decade later, the antelope have gone forth and multiplied so well that ten of them were recently transferred to a nature reserve in Mauritania, where authorities report the herd to be acclimating well to their new home.

Noah not only saved humanity in the ark, but modeled our obligation to protect animal life from extinction as well. This legacy has lived on as we see Israel doing its part to protect native wildlife and reintroduce once-extinct species to the world today. "Israel's Ambassador to Senegal, Gideon Behar, joked that although Israel does not have diplomatic relations with Mauritania...Israelis still roam there in the form of the antelope." ■

A Dangerous Project

Let us build a city and a tower (Genesis 11:4)

בנה לנו עיר ומגדל (בראשית יא:ד)

Parashat Noah chronicles the cryptic tale of the Tower of Babel and the efforts of its builders to "make for us a name," (11:4) as a seemingly peaceful goal. According to the Torah, when mankind began construction of the massive tower, God disapproved of the effort and dispersed mankind across the globe. What was the negative nature of the tower, and why did God disapprove? Rashi explains that at its core, the tower was intended to be a powerful weapon. "These [people] rejected [God's] goodness in order to rebel against the God who affected them for the good and saved them from the flood." According to Rabbi Yirmiyah in the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 38), one group said, "We will climb up [the tower] and make war [with God.]"

From mankind's earliest history, huge seemingly beneficial projects were rooted in a destructive military motivation. This sad truth is one we face still today as Iran's leadership constructs a project of similarly destructive dimensions.

In defiance of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions that require a full suspension of enrichment and heavy water activity, 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 (IAEA) report. Tehran's brutally repressive regime has dramatically enhanced its ability to produce nuclear weapons material. Iran plans to produce the first of its own enriched nuclear fuel within five months, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi said recently, [Agence France-Presse](#) reported. "We hope to produce the first domestic-made nuclear fuel plate within the next four to five months," Salehi said. The Islamic Republic began enriching uranium to 20 percent last February, and Salehi said that "around 70 kilograms of (20 percent-enriched) uranium has been produced in Iran" so far. While Iran claims that its nuclear research program is for peaceful purposes only, there is no peaceful explanation for Iran's rapid expansion of its enrichment capacity. The regime's current stockpile of uranium enriched to 20 percent is more than enough to fuel the Tehran Research Reactor and produce medical isotopes for the next decade—Iran's original justification for boosting the quality of its nuclear output. The United States 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, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The builders of the original Tower of Babel claimed that their construction would serve a peaceful goal to benefit mankind. Yet, their underlying military motives demanded divine intervention. The international community must similarly endeavor to halt Iran's efforts by implementing and enforcing sanctions to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. ■

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