

OCTOBER 16, 2017

Parashat Noah

Decades of Missed Opportunities

Make for yourself an ark... (Genesis 6:14)

עשה לך תבת... (בראשית ו:יד)

Michael Oren, Israel's former ambassador to the United States and current member of Knesset, was speaking in India to the Indian Council on Foreign Relations when, as he [describes in a Facebook post](#), the deputy Palestinian ambassador in India interrupted his lecture. Oren writes, "He claimed that I had not mentioned the two-state solution even once. I replied: 'The Palestinians are world record-holders in turning down the opportunity to establish their state. They did so in 1937, 1947, 2000 and in 2008. Are you, as a Palestinian representative, are [you] prepared to make history and be the first official to recognize the Jewish people as having the right to self-determination on its homeland, Israel? We cannot reach a two-state solution without mutual recognition.' Of course, he was not prepared to do so." While the Palestinians continue to attempt to blame Israel for the lack of progress towards the creation of their own state, Oren correctly notes the truth: Palestinians leaders have, for decades, missed or ignored opportunities to make peace with Israel and establish their own independent state. As we learn from a critical detail in Parashat Noah, it is their own intransigence and unwillingness to change that continues to haunt them.

Parashat Noah describes the deluge that destroyed the world. Noah, the one remaining righteous individual, is instructed to construct an ark to save himself, his family, and the animal population of earth. The ark would enable Noah to survive the ravages of the deluge and rebuild the world after the flood. Rashi (on 6:14) quoting the Midrash, asks the obvious question: Given the construction methods available to Noah and the sheer size of the ark, the vessel was nothing short of miraculous. In order to survive the flood, Noah required divine intervention and protection. If God was willing to intervene to save Noah, why demand that Noah build an ark? Why did God ask Noah to spend one hundred and twenty years building an ark that could never float on its own? Rashi explains that the construction of the ark was not intended to save Noah. Rather, it was directed at the people of his generation. "In order that the people of the Generation of the Flood should see him occupying himself with it for one hundred twenty years and ask him, 'For what do you need this?' And he would say to them, 'The Holy One, blessed be He, is destined to bring a flood upon the world.' Perhaps they would repent." For twelve decades Noah built the ark in order to encourage humanity to see the truth, seize the opportunity for change and build a future for themselves and their children. Tragically, rather than heed his message they ridiculed his project, rejected his ideals, and sealed their own terrible fate.

Sadly, Palestinian leaders have made precisely the same choices—choosing to blame Israel rather than seizing the opportunity to make peace with the Jewish state. Time and again, Israel has demonstrated its willingness to make tough sacrifices for peace: In 1982, Israel withdrew its forces and uprooted Jewish settlers from the Sinai Peninsula to implement its 1979 peace treaty with Egypt; Israel ceded responsibility for civil affairs and maintaining public order to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in parts of the West Bank where 95 percent of West Bank Palestinians live; and in 2005, Israel withdrew its forces and evacuated all Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip. Since the Palestinian Authority pulled out of direct talks in the spring of 2014, the PA has attempted to realize its objectives outside of negotiations by asking the United Nations and other international bodies to impose Palestinian terms on Israel, including joining the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2015, and its recent effort to [join the International Police Organization \(Interpol\)](#). These efforts, rather than increasing chances for peace, only serve to encourage the Palestinians to avoid direct negotiations and undermine the possibility of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Like the

people of Noah's generation, rather than seizing on the opportunities presented to them, Palestinian leadership continues to cast the blame on Israel and further dim the prospects for prosperity for themselves and their children. ■

Building Together for a Higher Purpose

Make for yourself an ark... (Genesis 6:14)

עשה לך תבת... (בראשית ו:יד)

When Israeli intelligence officers realized that Russian hackers were using popular virus protection software to spy on the United States, they alerted the United States to the broad Russian intrusion, which has not been previously reported, leading to a decision just last month to order Kaspersky software removed from government computers, the [New York Times reported](#). After uncovering evidence that Russian government hackers were using the software's access to scan for American government classified programs and pulling any findings back to Russian intelligence systems, [the Israelis] provided their N.S.A. counterparts with solid evidence of the Kremlin campaign in the form of screenshots and other documentation, prompting U.S. government agencies to take the necessary steps to protect government secrets. This episode represents one of a number of recent examples of the United States gaining tangible benefits from Israeli technological prowess, improving America's ability to protect itself and its interests around the world. It also demonstrates the power that can come from working together with others towards a higher purpose.

Parashat Noah begins and ends with construction projects. It begins with the commandment to Noah to engage in a massive project to build the ark that would save mankind, and concludes with the terse, cryptic story of the construction of the Tower of Babel, a project that was halted by God with the dispersal of humanity around the world. How did the two construction projects differ? Why did one bring such important success, while another was considered dangerous enough that it was stopped before it could be completed? Binyamin Cohen [writes](#) that these two stories teach us about the importance of combining cooperation and community with building for a higher purpose. "There is power and meaning in working for or towards something bigger than one's self. Still, [the two stories] do teach us different lessons about how that ideal should be manifest and how it can go wrong..." While the Tower of Babel demonstrated the power of community to achieve great things, "a community united for the wrong purpose can be dangerous, to itself and to the whole world." Noah, on the other hand, built his ark following a divine commandment, with the express purpose not only of saving himself, but of saving the entire world. Yet, "unlike in the Tower of Babel, there is no cooperation in his story, no working together with other humans for the betterment of humanity. In the end, Noah is left as a lonely and depressed man." These two construction projects convey the importance of combining these two elements together: on the one hand, harnessing the power of community to build together can be a powerful force. Yet, that force is only fully realized when it is utilized to achieve a purpose higher than self-interest, in the service of lofty and exalted goals.

This combination of shared responsibilities dedicated to higher goals aptly describes the strategic relationship between Israel and the United States. Each nation works not only for its own interests, but to further the values of freedom and democracy around the world. Rather than work only to further itself, each country shares valuable technologies and information it develops in order to protect and benefit its strategic partner. This is why Israeli technology is [now being installed](#) in US tanks to protect American soldiers from enemy rocket attacks, and why the United States is [considering purchasing Iron Dome batteries](#) to protect American military installations in Europe.

In the final passage of his monumental work *The Jewish State*, which outlined his vision for a homeland for the Jewish people, Theodore Herzl wrote, "Let me repeat once more my opening words: The Jews who wish for a state will have it. We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and die peacefully in our own homes." He then added, "The world will be freed by our liberty, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there to accomplish for our own welfare, will react powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity." Herzl recognized that the great country that the Jewish people would build would only thrive and flourish when its citizens worked not only for themselves, but to benefit the rest of the world. We take great pride in the partnership that Israel has together with the United States, as the two nations work together not only to benefit each-other, but to bring peace, prosperity, freedom and safety to the entire world. ■

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