

NOACH'S LESSONS FOR OUR DAY

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

Reading the story of Noah and the Ark, three of its lessons seem especially appropriate during these difficult days.

"And the earth had corrupted itself before G-d, and the earth was filled with violence." Even after the Flood, G-d still declared that "the desires of the heart of man are evil from his youth."

Sometimes, this evil is so great that the only way to remove it, and thereby improve the world, is to remove those who have chosen this evil. As Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch wrote concerning the Flood, "the degeneracy was so great that the extermination itself was an act of mercy."

It is true that we value peace. We believe in greeting those who hate us with peace offerings, as our forefather Yaakov did towards his brother Esav. But if not, if those who hate us will make war, we must respond in kind.

Some people believe, even today, that values are just a matter of perspective. In this vein, they insist that American "imperialism," global domination, and/or support for Israel, are partially to blame for the terror of September 11. Let us be clear: nothing justifies the murder of 6,000 civilians. This is not perspective, but good versus evil. Only an evil "perspective" rejoices at the death of innocents.

It is also not true, as some apologists comment, that these suicide terrorists "felt they had nothing left to live for." They were taught and deeply believed, instead, that they had every reason to die -- and the more of the infidels they took with them, the better. This is evil. The Torah commands us to kill a murderer, when necessary, to deny him the opportunity to murder an innocent.

Two: The World Can Condemn Good

As Noah built his Ark, the world laughed. Noah spent 120 years on his task; our Sages tell us that G-d provided this time span to permit and inspire the people of the world to turn back towards Him. Instead, they mocked Noah for over a century. This did not distract him at all, since he knew that evil ran rampant.

This, too, is a valuable thought for us today. Just a few months ago, the United Nations conducted a "Conference on Racism," where it targeted neither oppressive dictatorships nor those nations where

slavery flourishes, and spent days condemning Israel. UN "peacekeepers" allowed the Hizbullah to waltz past on its way to abducting three Israeli soldiers, then obstructed Israel's efforts to learn their fate. And just this week, the UN gave Syria, a life member of the US list of nations sponsoring terrorism, a seat on the Security Council.

In celebration of this stunning record of achievement, the UN is sharing the Nobel Peace Prize with Director-General Kofi Annan. And why not? After all, a previous honoree was the man who gave airplane hijacking its good name.

Speaking of Yasser Arafat, he was seen this week in London, where he announced at a news conference that he was "against all forms of terrorism." This was reported by the world media, but entirely without the sense of irony one might have expected when Ronald McDonald announced that he opposed eating meat.

Not so, of course, when Israel successfully tracked down the terrorist who planned the Dolphinarium bombing, and killed him as he planned more attacks. CNN would report only that Israel labeled him a "terrorist" (in quotes). Apparently, murderers of US soldiers are terrorists, but murderers of Israeli teens at a disco are not. The USA, which is currently engaging in unprecedented military action to track down and kill terrorists, "rebuked" Israel for ridding the world of Abdel Rahman Hamad. Rational people know that Arik (Prime Minister Sharon) need not apologize.

Three: We're in Good Hands

There is a third lesson, immediately applicable to our lives today. During the holidays, one writer claimed that the reason we ask (in our prayers) to be placed beneath the "Sukkah" of G-d's Peace is because the Sukkah is vulnerable. But, on the contrary, no place in the universe can offer the safety and protection of G-d's Presence. Our Sukkahs are flimsy to testify that the earth itself is flimsy. It means nothing. As Noah demonstrated, a person can spend a year in a boat, accompanied by more animals than the vessel could possibly hold, and less food than could possibly suffice -- and be entirely safe and secure.

Our G-d is good and merciful, and he cares for us. While it is appropriate for us to be vigilant and careful, there is no place for panic or hysteria.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik was once called to appear before the NKVD, predecessor of the equally-infamous Soviet KGB. With the possibility of imprisonment or hard labor lying before him, he fell asleep in their waiting room. How could it be? His answer was that with the Fear of G-d before him, there was room for no other fear.

Every bullet has an address. It is, without question, extremely unlikely that any one individual will be felled by anthrax or other terrorism. So please, let's go on with our lives. Thanks to the grace of G-d

we are alive and growing -- and with that in mind, let us keep current events in proper perspective during the weeks ahead.

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken