

VAYERA

Treaties, Dreams, and Differences

We were all astounded this past month to see Yasser Arafat extend his hand to Yitzhak Rabin and for both of them to shake hands. The Arabs believe very much in symbolic acts, and Yasser Arafat must have known that this act of shaking hands with Yitzhak Rabin would be broadcast live to billions of people throughout the world and that it would appear on the front page of almost every paper in the world. By his making this gesture he, in effect, was telling the world that the Palestinian people were willing to reconcile themselves to Jewish sovereignty in at least part of the land of Israel. It remains to be seen whether this gesture was done with a full heart and whether it will endure.

In the *Torah* reading for the first day of *Rosh Hashona* we learn about another Palestinian, another person from the region of Gaza, who make a treaty with our fathers. In the *Torah* portion *Vayera* we read, "And it was at that time that Avimelech and Fichel, the head of his army, said to Abraham saying, 'G-d is with you and all which you will do but now swear to me by G-d here that you will not be false to me nor to my son nor to my grandson, but that you will treat me and the land where you live as kindly as I have treated you.'" This, of course, is astounding because up to this time Avimelech had been very hostile to Abraham. In fact, we even read earlier how he had taken Sarah, Abraham's wife, at the time, not knowing she was Abraham's wife, how he had hounded Abraham and persecuted him and how he had taken his wells, how he had made his life miserable, and here, all of a sudden, he wants to make a treaty with Abraham. Avimelech had suddenly realized that the prosperity that he and his people had enjoyed was only because of Abraham. After Abraham had left them, their prosperity had decreased. Avimelech now wanted to make a treaty with Abraham. Abraham said that he would swear but first Abraham reproved Avimelech on account of the well of water which the servants of Avimelech had stolen. Abraham was willing to make a deal with Avimelech, but he was not willing to turn a blind eye to the offenses which Avimelech's servants had been conducting against him. He said, in effect, "If we have peace, it has to be complete peace. You cannot say that you are not responsible for the

different things that are going on in the different factions of the PLO," and Avimelech said, "I did not know who did this thing. Also, you did not tell me about it, and I did not hear about it until today." In effect, Avimelech was saying, "That must have been Hamas' doing. I did not have anything to do with it." Of course, what he meant was that from now on he would observe the letter and the spirit of this treaty. Abraham took from his sheep and cattle, and he gave them to Avimelech, and they cut between them a treaty. Notice that when Avimelech had come and wanted to make peace with Abraham, it was Abraham who had to give him things. Avimelech did not give things to Abraham. The same thing is happening today. Arafat and the PLO want to make peace with Israel so Israel has to give them things: Gaza and Jericho at the beginning. Abraham stood seven sheep in front of them and Avimelech said, "What are these seven *Kevesot*, these seven sheep which you have stood before me?" Abraham was giving Avimelech a message here. "*Keves*" in Hebrew can have several meanings. The "*Shin*" and the "*Sin*" in common speech especially are interchangeable. "*Kevesh*" can also mean "to conquer." It can also mean "to pickle." It can also mean "secrets" and "a footstool." Abraham was, in effect, telling Avimelech, "You want to make peace with me? Good, but don't make any secret deals with anybody else. Don't have any secret plans in your heart that you are going to wipe me out, that you are going to pickle me and throw me in the sea, that you are going to conquer me, that you are going to make me into a footstool. If we have an agreement, it has to be an agreement to live with me in true peace and not fake peace." Abraham again said to Avimelech, "These seven sheep that you take from my hand shall be as a witness that I dug this well." In other words, you cannot all of a sudden come and take more territory and more territory and more territory. This is my well. I dug this well. "Therefore, they called the name of this place Beer Sheva, because there both of them swore, and they cut a treaty at Beer Sheva and Avimelech got up and Fichel, the head of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines," or as the Romans would call it, the land of Palestine. "Abraham planted an Eshel in Beer Sheva," which meant that he planted a tamarisk, which the rabbis say also stands for *Achila Sh'teeah Lena*. He went about his job of providing food and nourishment and drink and lodging to wayfarers who came by in order to sanctify G-d's name.

“And Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines for many days.”

We see, therefore, that the treaty that Arafat and Rabin signed is not the first time that a treaty has been made between the Jewish people and the people who live in the land of the Philistines, the people who live around Gaza. But there are certain requirements that have to be met in order for a treaty between the Jewish people and the people of Gaza to hold, in order for a treaty to be valid. First of all, the rabbis tell us, both sides have to recognize that there is justice on both sides. That is why in the *Torah* portion *Shofteem* we say *Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof*, righteousness, righteousness, you should pursue. Unfortunately, there are many, even Jews, who only see justice in the Arab side, but they did not see that the Jewish side has any justice in it at all. The justice of the Jewish side also has to be taken into consideration. We also learn from Abraham and Avimelech's treaty that a treaty must be based on truth. It cannot be a fake treaty. Both sides must live up to the treaty. Both sides cannot claim other people are violating the treaty but not them. Both sides have to be aware of any violations, and these violations have to be stopped if both sides are going to be able to live together in peace.

On *Rosh Hashona* we blew the *shofar* in *shul*. As we all know, the *shofar* has two sounds. It has a *Tekiah* and a *Teruah*. The rabbis are not sure exactly what the *Teruah* is. Is the *Teruah* a sob, or is the *Teruah* really a long elongated sigh? The rabbis also say that if it is a sob, a duh duh duh, we are looking into our soul. If it is an elongated sigh, dat dat dat dat dat dat dat dat, it means that we are listening to the troubles of other people. The Arabs must know that the Jews of Israel want to make peace because they are listening to the dat dat dat dat. They are listening to the suffering and the anguish of the Arabs. Israel wants the Arabs, too, to be treated justly in the world. The sound that the Arabs should not believe that Israel is hearing is the sigh, duh duh duh, which means that Israel is tired and giving up. The Arabs should not feel that the Jewish people have signed this agreement because they are tired and cannot go on anymore, because if they feel this way then, rest assured, this agreement is just the beginning of a bigger battle. If the Arabs think that Israel is signing this treaty out of weakness, because it is tired of the struggle, even though it could win the struggle, if the Arabs feel that Israel is tired of the struggle and does not

want to take any more losses, then we are in for trouble. If the Arabs think Israël feels the same way that the United States eventually felt about Viet Nam, where it just got tired of it and wanted to get out of it, then we are in for big trouble. When Gorbachev allowed the Berlin Wall to be broken down, we all thought that it was because Communism wanted to make an accommodation with the West, but it turned out that this was not so. What it meant was that nobody in Russia was willing to fight for Communism anymore, that they were no longer convinced of its rightness, that the Communists in Russia were not willing to fight for the Berlin Wall and that they are not willing to fight for Lithuania and Estonia and Latvia and even the Ukraine, which has been part of Russia for 300 years, either. In fact, later on it turned out that the Russian Communists were not even willing to fight for Communism in Russia and Communism, itself, was banned in Russia. With the loss of only 3 lives, Communism ended in the Soviet Union. Arafat and the PLO should not think that the Jewish people are uttering a sigh of despair and that we are giving up and that it would be easy to push us into the sea and to take over all of Israel but, instead, they should realize that Israel is listening to the dat dat dat dat, the anguish of the Palestinians, that Israel has made an agreement with the PLO because it wants to put an end to Arab suffering, too. We are hearing their cries, too. They, too, are human beings and that they, too, should not have to live in squalor. Perhaps now the Arabs will realize that the Jewish people will do more for them and help them more than their own brothers who were willing to leave them in refugee camps for over 45 years, who were not willing to do anything to ameliorate their lives.

We also learn that on *Rosh Hashona*, Joseph got out of prison. Joseph was a dreamer of dreams but, unfortunately, at the beginning, he only listened to his own dreams. He was not sensitive to the dreams of other people. The rabbis ask why was it that Joseph was sent to prison? After all, he did not do anything wrong. It was his master's wife who had tried to seduce him but, yet, he was sent to prison. The rabbis answer because he did not know how to listen to the dreams of others. It was only when he was put in prison that he began to listen to the dreams of others, the dreams of the butler and the baker, and once he learned how to listen to the dreams, as well as his own dreams, then he was fit to come out of prison. Then he was

fit to become a leader of people, a leader of nations. Leadership requires that we learn how to paper over differences because dreams conflict. There is nothing wrong with papering over differences. The rabbis say that as long as we are allowed to live and allowed to practice our religion, then we should paper over differences. We should not accentuate differences. Abraham was willing to make a treaty with Avimelech, but in the beginning of the *Torah* reading for the first day of *Rosh Hashona*, we learn how Abraham expelled Ishmael from the camp at Sarah's urging. G-d said, "Listen to her voice," because Ishmael was intent upon killing Yitzhak. He had good reason for doing so. He wanted to inherit everything. He tried to pretend that it was all a game. He was only shooting arrows, but, of course, everyone knew that once Yitzhak would be out of the way, Ishmael would be the sole heir of Abraham. He would inherit everything both physically and spiritually, and that is what he wanted to do. Therefore, Ishmael had to be expelled, but Avimelech did not want to wipe out Abraham and his family. Therefore, a treaty could be made with him. Unless the differences between you and your foe are about your very existence or are about preventing you from practicing your religion, then you can paper them over, Judaism teaches.

The same thing is true in a marriage. In a marriage, we all know that we have to paper over differences. That is one of the miracles of marriage. People can stay married even though they have different views of things. We all know that we have to paper over differences. We all know that there are certain subjects that we should avoid in marriage. Someone came to me wanting a divorce after being married for 25 years. I asked the gentleman why he wanted the divorce. He said, "Well, we have basic differences." I asked why he could not have basic differences for another 25 years. We all know that, in life, it is possible to get along even though we disagree on many things.

This past year has been *Tof Shin Nun Gimmel*, which many rabbis explain stood for *Nais Gadol*, which means in Hebrew "a big miracle." They said that in the year just passed. We were going to see a great miracle. This year is *Tof Shin Nun Dalet*. Some rabbis say that this stands for "*Nais Dagul*," which in Hebrew means "an outstanding miracle." Let us hope that the miracle of the past year, Arafat shaking hands with Rabin, will

last, that it will not have been just a momentary aberration of the hatred that the Palestinian people have shown to our people, but that it is truly the beginning of a wonderful, cooperative relationship, that this year we will see an outstanding miracle, the outstanding miracle of the Jewish people and the Palestinian people reconciled to each other and living together as brothers.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who was walking on a street when he was accosted by a robber who asked for his wallet. They fought and they fought. Finally, at the end of a half an hour, the robber was able to grab the wallet from the man's pocket. He looked in the wallet and found only dollar. He said, "You fought all that time for just one dollar?" The man said, "Oh, if I had known we were fighting for the dollar, I would not have fought so hard. I thought you wanted the \$100 in my shoe." Let us hope and pray that the Jews and the Arabs will live together in harmony and peace in the coming year and that truly we will be able to live as brothers, because the Arabs will no longer want to throw us into the sea, that they will be satisfied with living together with us as brothers in the land of Israel. May this truly come to pass in the coming year and may the *Mashiach* come soon.