

NOVEMBER 5, 2007

Parashat Toldot

What's Next?

Im kein, lamah zeh anochi? “If it is so, why is it so for me?” (Genesis 25:22)

We are all familiar with our Matriarchs' fertility problems. Rivkah waited years for the ability to have a child but, when she finally conceives, her pregnancy is incredibly difficult. Confused, she utters a phrase familiar to many who have suffered – she wants to know “why me?” Ramban, in his commentary on this *pasuk*, compares Rivkah's question to a *pasuk* in Iyov (10:19), *Ka'asher lo hayiti e'h'yeh*. With such a difficult pregnancy, Rivkah wishes she had never been born.

It is tempting, when things look bleak, to say, “Why me?” A better question to ask might be, “What's next?” What can I do – what power can I use – that I haven't yet tried?

The fact of the matter is that we have a great deal of power to do good. As patriotic citizens of the United States, we have the right – some would say the obligation – to tell our elected officials how we feel about the major issues of the day. In fact, our representatives in Washington rely on us to do so. As Senators Evan Bayh (D-IN) and Jon Kyl (R-AZ) recently wrote, “Despite the constant flow of data and the sheer volume of constituent letters and emails, among the most meaningful and therefore most useful information we receive comes from face-to-face meetings with our constituents. Nothing replaces the insight we gain from engaging in conversation with men and women who care so passionately about issues that they take the time to meet with us in our home state offices or in our nation's capital.”

We know that Rivkah *Imeinu* does not give in to despair and, eventually, gives birth to two boys. We, too, can fight through the temptation to despair by asking, “What's next?” ■

Redoubled Efforts

Vayachp'ru avdei Yitzchak “And Yitzchak's servants dug” (Genesis 26:19)

Before Yitzchak leaves the land of Avimelech, the Philistines stop up his wells with dirt. As he settles in the land of G'rar, we are again told a story dealing with wells. Why does the Torah go into such detail about Yitzchak's supply of water? And why does it specifically tell us that Yitzchak's servants had to dig anew these wells?

In his commentary on this verse, the Chafetz Chayim explains that the Torah goes into this detail to teach us not to give up in discouragement. When we encounter difficulty, we should redouble our efforts rather than quit. This may seem like a simple, almost childish lesson – but consider its practical importance!

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors' recent report says that “contrary to the decisions of the Security Council, Iran has not suspended its enrichment related activities” and is now operating close

to 2,000 centrifuges at its nuclear facility in Natanz. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad claims that Iran is running 3,000 centrifuges—enough to produce fuel for a nuclear weapon. The IAEA report also states that Iran is continuing construction of the heavy water production plant at Arak in direct violation of Resolution 1737. The report further acknowledges that Iran may possess undeclared nuclear materials and concludes that “the Agency remains unable to verify certain aspects relevant to the scope and nature of Iran’s nuclear program.”

Should we give up and accept that the world’s largest state-sponsor of terrorism will be a nuclear power? Certainly not according to the lesson of our *parashah*.

The Security Council, which erred by delaying additional sanctions early this fall, must act decisively to strengthen sanctions on Iran. To change Iran’s course, the international community must exhaust every economic, diplomatic and political tool to further isolate the regime and increase the economic pressure to persuade the government to end its nuclear program. More robust penalties can still persuade the Iranian regime to suspend its nuclear pursuit.

We must redouble our efforts to impose new, stronger sanctions on Iran. ■

The Voice of Jacob

Hakol kol Ya’akov “The voice is the voice of Ya’akov” (Genesis 27:22)

As Ya’akov dresses up in goat skins to procure the blessing from his father, Yitzchak feels his younger son’s hands and is momentarily confused. The voice belongs to his son, Ya’akov. But *hayadayim y’dei Eisav*. Midrash (B’reishit Rabbah 65:20) tells us that “the voice of Jacob” refers to learning and truth while “the hands of Eisav” means force and violence. As long as *kol Ya’akov* is heard in the houses of study, *y’dei Eisav* will not prevail against him.

The lesson of the Midrash is clear: if we speak wisely and truthfully, force and violence are unable to gain traction against us. The implied opposite is according to Pirkei Avot (5:8) – *cherev ba’ah la’olam inu’i hadin v’al ivut hadin*.

Let us, then, speak wisely and truthfully about the gathering cloud of the Iranian nuclear program and encourage our elected officials to do the same. The U.S. has taken an important step in this direction by recently designating the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) a weapons proliferator and supporter of terrorism.

The U.S. action is wise in that it specifically targets nine companies owned or controlled by the IRGC. These IRGC entities, which control up to 40 percent of Iran’s economy, are heavily involved in Iran’s energy and construction sectors and have a growing presence in Iran’s financial and commercial sectors. The move will have a direct impact on the ability of Guard-owned companies to conduct business. The designation will also limit the IRGC’s access to supplies, credit and capital for its funding of terrorism and pursuit of nuclear weapons and creates an incentive for European firms to halt their business dealings with IRGC-affiliated organizations.

The U.S. action was also truthful as the Revolutionary Guard is, in fact, a weapons proliferator and a supporter of terrorism. The IRGC has assisted in the development of the Natanz uranium enrichment plant, and has helped develop and test Iran’s Shihab-3 ballistic missile. The IRGC has a long history of providing weapons, training and financial support to Hizballah. It operates training camps for Hizballah in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley and provides the group roughly \$100 million to \$200 million in funding a year. It has supplied Hamas with extensive funding, training and weaponry. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns told CNN in June that there is “irrefutable evidence” that the IRGC is sending weapons to the Taliban.

Let us speak wisely and truthfully – and let us do so before it is too late. ■

Sermon tidbits are intended for your use without attribution. Please feel free to use some or all of the material. Although it is not necessary, it is appreciated if copies of sermons or articles that use the ideas presented here are sent to synagogue@aipac.org.