

NOVEMBER 19, 2007

Parashat Vayishlach

Whether 'tis Nobler

Vateikah kaf-yerech Ya'akov “*And Ya'akov's hip was dislocated*” (Genesis 32:26)

Throughout his commentary on Sefer Bereishit, Ramban repeats a common theme to explain the experiences of our ancestors – *ma'asei avot siman l'vanim*. Ramban explains that the experiences of our ancestors will be repeated by the nation as a whole and that the methods with which they dealt with their tribulations should act as a guide to later generations. This is true of Ya'akov's wrestling match with the *ish*. Ramban explains that the fight is symbolic of B'nei Yisrael's future struggle with the other nations of the world. The angel was able to wound Ya'akov but unable to kill him. So will the nations of the world be able to hurt B'nei Yisrael, but unable to annihilate them.

Throughout the ages, our people have survived countless attempts to destroy the Jews – each time, we have outlived those who sought our destruction. From the Babylonians to the Romans to the Nazis, we have managed to survive. Too often, our survival as a people has come at a heavy price.

If Ya'akov's fight is symbolic of B'nei Yisrael's future struggles, and if *ma'asei avot siman l'vanim*, then the lesson we should draw from Ya'akov is to take action. Ya'akov didn't simply allow the *ish* to defeat him – he acted. He wasn't a passive observer of the struggle – rather, he was an active participant.

It may well be the fate B'nei Yisrael to continue to go through the trials and tribulations of history. If, however, we can bring about peace or lessen the price paid for our survival by our own actions, isn't that worth the effort? ■

Under the Influence

Im Lavan Garti “*I have lived with Lavan*” (Genesis 32:5)

As Ya'akov travels, he sends messengers ahead to his brother, Eisav. In his commentary on this *pasuk*, Rashi notes that the word *garti* has the numerical value of 613 – the same as the *Taryag Mitzvot*. Rashi takes this to mean that, despite living in the presence of Lavan's bad influence, Ya'akov has still managed to keep the commandments.

We all know that we are impacted – positively and negatively – by those around us. Ya'akov was able to resist being corrupted by a negative influence when most people would not have been. This impact is why our tradition suggests we steer clear of bad influences and embrace good ones.

The new Palestinian government has taken important steps but can and must do more to ensure peace efforts have a chance to succeed. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad have taken initial steps toward isolating Hamas and forming a government committed to peace with Israel, including closing down Hamas

charities and institutions, cracking down on incitement in mosques and beginning security reforms. Abbas' government needs to increase its efforts to fight terrorism and dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, key requirements of the first phase of the Roadmap. Perhaps most importantly, the PA also must continue with its policy of rejecting an accommodation with an unreconstructed Hamas that opposes peace with Israel.

The Arab states also have an important role in supporting Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. Arab states should attend the upcoming Annapolis meeting and provide Abbas with the political support he will need to make tough compromises. Furthermore, if Arab states are truly committed to the creation of a Palestinian state, they must back up their public support for the moderate Palestinian leadership with tangible financial support. Arab states must also begin to prepare their own people to recognize Israel's right to exist, end their economic boycott and support a peace agreement with the Jewish state. Unfortunately, 14 Arab nations attended a November meeting of the Arab League boycott. Lastly, Arab states must take responsibility for supporting peace by rejecting the extremism of terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hizballah and ending anti-Israel incitement in their media.

As the Palestinian government continues to make positive progress, the last thing it needs is the evil influence of Hamas. As Israel, the Abbas government, and several Arab states prepare to meet in Annapolis later this month, we should call for the continued isolation of Hamas. ■

Enemies and Friends

Hatzileini nah miyad achi miyad eisav “Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav” (Genesis 32:12)

As Ya'akov learns that his brother, Eisav, is approaching at the head of an army, he prays that HaShem will deliver him from certain doom. Why does he repeat the word *miyad*? According to the words of Mishlei, *ne'emanim pitz'ei ohev* (Proverbs 27:6). As we learn in the Tosfot to Ta'anit 20a, when a brother turns into an enemy, he becomes much more dangerous than any stranger. The Tosfot, however, adds that when enemies become friends it is the strongest of friendships.

No one is under the impression that the upcoming meeting in Annapolis will result in Israelis and Palestinians being best friends. But there is reason to be hopeful for positive progress toward peace.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has consistently reiterated Israel's commitment to advancing the peace process and to making difficult political decisions despite threats. Olmert recently said that at the Annapolis meeting he will “extend my hand in friendship and goodwill to all those who come to the meeting” and that “all the historic questions which are pertinent to the disagreement between us and the Palestinians are on the agenda.” Meanwhile, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad have taken initial steps toward isolating Hamas and forming a government committed to peace with Israel, including closing down Hamas charities and institutions, cracking down on incitement in mosques and beginning security reforms.

Olmert has made clear that Israel is prepared to make the sacrifices necessary for peace, saying: “We will not avoid fulfilling our own obligations to the letter. Some of them are difficult, some will create considerable political hardships – and I have no intention, no matter how difficult it is, of attempting to escape the obligations imposed on the State of Israel.” The Palestinian Authority must continue to combat terrorism, dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, and resist rapprochement with Hamas unless it recognizes Israel's right to exist and renounces terrorism.

While there is a long way to go – and our activism and vigilance is still called for – we look forward to the day when Israel's enemies can be her strongest friends. ■