



# Sermon Tidbits

DECEMBER 1, 2008

## Parashat Vayetze

### Taking the Initiative

**Lo nuchal ad asher yei'asfu kol ha'adarim – “We cannot until we gather all the flocks together” (Genesis 29:7)**

When Jacob arrives in Haran he happens upon the shepherds loitering at the well. Jacob wonders why the shepherds aren't working, “Lo, it is yet high day neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together.” (29:7) The shepherds responded, “We cannot [work] until all the flocks be gathered together, and they roll the stone from the well's mouth.” (Verse 8) This story of the well communicates important principles about cooperation. When confronted with the problem of water theft the shepherds arrived at a clever solution: placing a heavy stone on the well that they could only lift together. Yet their stone, while shrewdly placed, also led them to laziness and inertia. The shepherds wasted valuable time waiting for each other when their sheep should have been grazing.

Today, just as the shepherds' inertia led them to waste time waiting for each other to arrive, so too is the international community wasting time in confronting Iranian nuclear ambitions. While a unified effort would exert powerful pressure on Iran, many nations seem content to be like the shepherds and wait until all of the other nations arrive at the same conclusion before they work together. While they wait Iran's uranium enrichment proceeds unabated.

Recently, Iran's nuclear chief said that his country now has more than 5,000 centrifuges operating at its uranium enrichment plant in Natanz. The announcement comes just days after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) indicated that Iran has now produced roughly enough nuclear material, with additional processing needed, to make a single nuclear bomb. At this rate, Iran could have a crude weapon in as little as six months. While Iran's illicit work continues further pressure and sanctions are needed. With Iran having left itself extremely vulnerable to political and economic pressure, international sanctions remain the best way to persuade Iran to forgo its pursuit of nuclear weapons. The U.S. must lead the international community in an urgent and comprehensive economic, diplomatic and political sanctions campaign to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran before it's too late.

Waiting for the other shepherds – or in the case of Iran, countries – to act, wastes valuable time which cannot be recovered. Each country must take responsibility to ensure that it curtails its own economic activity with Iranian interests in order to act before time runs out and Iran achieves nuclear military capability. ■

### Words Really Do Matter

**V'einei Leah rakot – “And Leah's eyes were weak” (Genesis 29:17)**

The Torah describes Rachel as, “beautiful of form and fair to look at,” but of Leah we only learn of her “weak eyes.” What weakened Leah's eyes? Rashi (on verse 17) explains: “For she assumed that she would marry Esau...for everyone said, Rebecca has two sons, and Laban two daughters. The elder (Leah) [will marry the] elder (Esau), and the younger (Rachel) the younger (Jacob).” Leah shed tears for a future tying her to Esau. Still, why did she cry? When the time came she could simply refuse to marry Esau. Why did it matter to her what “everyone said?” Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk explains that we should not easily negate what “people say.” Rather, he states that the word on the street often carries not only great wisdom, but great importance as well. Leah realized the power the

public's attitude has both on individuals and the public at large. Tragically, she felt powerless against the "word on the street." She weakened her eyes mourning her own tragic future rather than working to change attitudes.

The power of public perception carried great weight in ancient Haran, and today it is equally important. What people think truly matters. Public perspectives on important issues ultimately determine policies, both personal and national. This rule especially applies in a democracy like the United States. Our elected officials realize that they represent constituents' attitudes and carry out their wishes in the halls of government. Therefore, we must capably communicate our attitudes to the people shaping decisions and molding United States' public policy.

Our elected officials make daily decisions which affect the United States' relationship with Israel. They determine the strength, form and value of support given to Israel by the U.S. These decisions affect diplomatic interaction as well as the level of financial, economic and military support which the U.S. provides to Israel. However, our representatives can only gather so much information on their own and they rely on the "word on the street," the letters and phone calls of their constituents. The more they learn, from the citizens they represent, about the importance of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, the more they act to transform that support into policy. When we make our voices heard to our elected representatives and when we tell them how strongly we feel about supporting Israel they will take that message into account when voting on matters affecting the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Leah was right: words do matter. However, instead of following her lead and weeping for what we don't like we must make our voice heard and advocate for Israel. We have the ability to turn our powerful words into reality. ■

## Reticence to Respond

### **Zeh li esrim shanah b'beitecha – "These twenty years I have been in your house..." (Genesis 31:41)**

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Jacob, having been fooled time and again by his father-in-law Laban, continually refuses to react. Our Sages say (Talmud Shabbat 88b) "Those who suffer insult but do not insult in response; who hear their disgrace but do not reply...of them it says, (Judges 5:31) 'But they who love Him [God] shall be as the sun going forth in its might.'" Jacob fulfills this dictate numerous times as he tells Laban, "These twenty years that I have been in your house...you changed my wages ten times." (Genesis 31:41) Throughout all of these times, Jacob never protested – until now. What changed? Why did Jacob finally confront Laban? Jacob realized that Laban was not simply threatening his livelihood, but rather, Laban's challenge posed an existential threat to Jacob and his family. This time, when threatened with his very survival, Jacob understood the need to respond to Laban and speak out and defend his family.

Today, just as Jacob showed restraint in the face of ongoing treachery, Israel continues to demonstrate moderation in the face of ongoing Hamas aggression. However, if Hamas' provocative activity continues, Israel may be forced to take more assertive action.

In the past few weeks events along the Gaza border have taken a dangerous turn. Hamas and other Palestinian terrorists have fired some 170 rockets and mortars at Israel, and Hamas continues to build up its military capabilities. Hamas continues to increase its rocket and other weapons capabilities by smuggling technology into Gaza from Egypt and Hamas terrorists are now using underground Qassam launch silos to make it more difficult for the IDF to find and destroy them. The launchers, similar to those used by Hizballah, can also be operated by remote control. In addition to increasing its rocket capabilities, Hamas has smuggled into Gaza from Egypt shoulder-fired RPG anti-tank missiles, assault rifles, high-quality explosives and anti-aircraft missiles, according to Israeli security officials. Like every other sovereign nation, Israel has the right and responsibility to defend its citizens if these attacks continue. For more information on the recent upsurge in Hamas attacks click [here](#).

While Israel continues to take steps to minimize the suffering of the citizens of Gaza the Hamas regime must curtail the senseless and unprovoked attacks on Israeli citizens and population centers. Otherwise, like Jacob, Israel will not be able to continue to "look the other way" while the safety and security of her citizens is at stake. ■