

NOVEMBER 9, 2009

Parashat Chayei Sarah

Nefarious Negotiations

Vayishkol Avraham Le'Efron – “And Abraham paid to Ephron” (Genesis 23:16)

While Abraham and Ephron agreed to a price of 400 *shekels* for the purchase of the Cave of *Machpelah*, when the time came to actually transfer the funds the price was changed. The Talmud (Baba Metziah 87) explains that after concluding amiable public negotiations, Ephron insisted upon “400 *shekels* of silver, *oveir lasocher* – current money with the merchant.” How were these *shekels* different than regular *shekels*? Whereas Ephron originally agreed to the 400 *shekels*, he later refused to take anything but 400 *kanatra* (a currency worth many times the value of a simple *shekel*) because, as the Talmud states, “there was a place that called a ‘*kanatra*’ a ‘*shekel*.’” Left with few options and urgently needing of a burial ground for Sarah, Abraham paid the exorbitant price.

Ephron recognized the importance of timing in his negotiations with Abraham and exploited Abraham’s urgency for his own benefit. Today, Iran appears to have learned from Ephron’s example. Recognizing that the West is urgently seeking a diplomatic way to halt Iran’s nuclear program, the Islamic Republic is seeking to exploit this urgency to avoid their international obligations.

Iran has recently refused a United Nations-backed offer to process its low-enriched uranium (LEU). According to Reuters, the “proposal would see Iran sending most of its low-enriched uranium abroad by the end of the year for further enrichment before being returned to Iran as fuel for a medical reactor in Tehran.” As with past talks, Iran did not reject the agreement, but offered its own proposal in an effort to stretch out the negotiations. Iran is now offering to send only a small portion of its LEU out of the country, thus maintaining the possibility that Iran can use its existing stockpile to produce a nuclear bomb. Once again Iran is using negotiations over a lesser matter as a way to distract from the main requirement of the international community – the long-overdue suspension of its enrichment of uranium, which is mandated by five U.N. Security Council resolutions. By drawing out the negotiations Iran hopes to exploit the natural tendency of democracies to negotiate in order to buy critical time to develop nuclear weapons. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

If negotiations fail and Iran continues its uranium enrichment, then the world must impose crippling sanctions on the Islamic Republic. While Abraham had no choice but to accept Ephron’s negotiating tactics and pay the higher fee, a nuclear Iran is a price which the international community simply cannot afford. ■

The Hidden Truth

Vayaratz Lavan – “And Laban ran” (Genesis 24:29)

The rabbis of the Midrash painted a decidedly negative picture of Laban, describing him as corrupt, greedy and selfish. Why is Laban portrayed this way? Rabbi Yehudah Nachshoni (Studies on the Parashah, p. 87) explained that Laban’s traits emerged not from explicit events, but rather from the details which are implicit in the text. We read that Laban only welcomed Eliezer “when he saw the ring, and the bracelets upon his sister’s hands.” (24:30) Rashi (on 24:29) develops this idea by explaining that Laban only ran to greet Eliezer because “when he saw the ring (on Rebecca) he said, ‘this man is wealthy!’ and turned his eyes towards [Eliezer’s] money.” Therefore, Laban’s apparent

hospitality was really a ruse designed to hide his greed in the pretext of caring for the well-being of his sister. The rabbis of the Midrash understood Laban's true intentions and portrayed him negatively because of his attempt to cloak his selfishness in altruism.

Like Laban, the United Nations Human Rights Council portends to care for others. However, by endorsing a stinging criticism of Israel, allegedly in the name of justice, the council has once more revealed that it is more interested in delegitimizing the Jewish State than working to achieve peace.

While claiming a mandate to support human rights, the U.N. Human Rights Council has recently recommended the Goldstone Report for further action. Moreover, on November 4th, the U.N. General Assembly endorsed the findings of this biased report and called on the U.N. Secretary General to transmit the report to the U.N. Security Council for further action. The report explicitly fails to recognize that Israel's actions in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead were part of a legitimate response to ongoing attacks by terrorist groups. Instead, the report equates the actions of terrorists with those of a democratic country reluctantly taking action to defend itself while taking unprecedented steps to minimize civilian casualties. Recognizing that any actions based on such an unjust report will only make the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks more difficult, and in order to protect the rights of democracies to defend themselves, the House of Representatives passed H. Res. 867. This resolution, which passed by an overwhelming vote of 344-36, calls on the "President and the Secretary of State to oppose unequivocally any endorsement or further consideration of the... [Goldstone Report]...in multilateral fora." For more on the Goldstone Report, click [here](#).

Too many countries use the U.N. as a forum to heap unfair criticism upon Israel. Following Laban's behavior, they hide their selfish motives behind a pretense of caring for others. Now, the U.N. should follow Congress' lead, reject these duplicitous claims and support the right of nations to self-defense. ■

Rebecca's Choice

Ha'telchi im ha'ish hazeh – "Will you go with this man?" (Genesis 24:58)

In many ancient societies men bought wives in a manner very much resembling slavery. It should come as no surprise then that Bethuel and Laban agreed to Rebecca's marriage to Isaac without ever asking for her consent. It was only when Rebecca's family hoped to delay her departure, and to enhance their profit, that they suddenly decided to ask her opinion. While asking a potential bride if she consents to her own marriage may seem innocuous, the Jewish people derive a critical law from this episode. Chizkuni (on 25:20) states, "from here we learn that one may not marry a Jewish woman without her consent." While obvious in today's society, this law represented a critical departure from contemporary cultural practices. Moreover, this law gave Jewish women an important voice in their own lives that other societies denied.

The female self-determination exhibited in our *parashah* is an example of the unparalleled view with which Judaism treats women. Today, Israel continues to live up to this tradition, not only by guaranteeing equal rights to women, but also by making women's issues a central theme in Israeli society.

Unlike in any other Middle Eastern nation, women in Israel are guaranteed equal rights and equal pay, and are at the forefront of many aspects of society. Israel has always had at least one woman on its Supreme Court and Israel is the only country in the Middle East to elect a woman to the position of Prime Minister. In fact, just last year Israel had a woman serving in two of its highest government positions – Minister of Foreign Affairs and Knesset Speaker. Israel also makes a significant effort to highlight women's issues in policy. To that end Israel recently hosted the 26th biennial International Women's Leadership Conference. The conference focused on gender issues, the impact of the current financial crisis on all aspects of society and on the involvement of women in decision-making processes.

Although unusual in its day, Rebecca's choice was a turning point for the Jewish people. In today's Israel, the equal rights of women, from serving in the military to excelling in all levels of society, is a point of national pride. ■