

NOVEMBER 16, 2009

## Parashat Toldot

### Armed and Dangerous

**Vayehi Eisav ish yodeya tzayid – “And Esau was a cunning hunter” (Genesis 25:27)**

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Commentators disagree on how to interpret the Torah’s unusual description of Esau. Many accept the simple textual explanation that Esau was a skilled hunter who was proficient in the arts of tracking and killing. However, Rashi disagreed in favor of the classical Midrashic interpretation. Rashi explained that the words *yodea tzayid* – a knower of trapping – referred to Esau’s tongue. “[He knew how to] trap and lie to his father with his mouth, asking him: ‘Father, how does one tithe the salt and the straw?’ (items that do not require tithing),” in order to give his father the false impression of his piety. Chizkuni adds that Esau was a “professional fraud,” noting that hunting requires craftiness and deceit. Thus, by stating that Esau was a cunning hunter the Torah uses a double entendre to describe Esau as someone who could kill his prey and fool his father as well.

Our *parashah*’s focus on Esau’s proficiency in the arts of deceit and killing is particularly timely this week as the world witnessed the daring capture of the *Francop*, a cargo ship laden with Iranian weapons bound for Hezbollah.

While Iran has denied any involvement in the arms shipment discovered on the captured merchant ship, recent evidence conclusively demonstrates Iranian involvement in the consignment. Hidden among dozens of other containers on board, and disguised as civilian goods, the ship contained 36 containers with 500 tons of weaponry en route to the Hezbollah terrorist organization in Lebanon. Israeli personnel seized a total of about 9,000 mortar bombs, 3,000 Katyusha rockets, 3,000 recoilless gun shells, 20,000 grenades and over a half million rounds of small arms ammunition. This represents the largest arms shipment that Israel has ever commandeered and amounts to 75% of the total weapons fired at Israel during the 2006 war.

In a closed-door United Nations Security Council meeting, a U.S. diplomat said that the concealed arms shipment, “clearly manifested from Iran to Syria” in violation of a March 2007 arms embargo, provides “unambiguous evidence of the destabilizing proliferation of arms in the region.” The Security Council was meeting to discuss the implementation of the 2006 cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah. Meanwhile, the Jerusalem Post reports that senior Hezbollah official Mahmoud Kamati denied that the weapons were bound for Hezbollah, calling such claims a “ridiculous lie.” To view a slideshow containing pictures and more information on the *Francop*, click [here](#).

Iranian refusal to accept responsibility for its continued support of terrorist organizations like Hezbollah reminds us that both Iran and Hezbollah personify the militancy and cunning of Esau, the original *yodea tzayid*. Now, the international community must band together and declare that it will no longer turn a blind-eye to violations of the cease fire and the continued rearmament of Hezbollah. ■

### The Science of Scent

**Vayarach et reyach begadav – “And he smelled the scent of his clothing” (Genesis 27:27)**

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Due to his failing eyesight, Isaac could not tell whether the son standing before him was Jacob or Esau and therefore instructed his son to “Come close and kiss me” (27:26). How would a kiss from his son help Isaac understand who was standing before him? Isaac remembered Esau’s distinct smell and knew that by having his son kiss him he would

be able to tell if it was Esau or Jacob. Radak (on verse 27:15) notes that Rebecca had anticipated this possibility and had clothed Jacob in “the choicest garments of Esau her elder son.” As Radak explains, “Esau stored [his finest clothes] with grasses from the field so that [they] would accumulate the fresh smell.”

As an old man with poor vision Isaac relied heavily on his sense of smell, a fact which Rebecca exploited to help Jacob. Now, with new Israeli research, the world may finally understand how smells affect the memory and why Rebecca was able to successfully trick her husband.

In a study, which was recently published in the journal *Current Biology*, researchers from the Israeli Weizmann Institute of Science demonstrated that first smells – the first time a person smells a particular fragrance or odor – create biological imprints on the brain. According to the study’s co-author Yaara Yeshurun, speaking in U.S. News and World Report, Israeli researchers using functional MRI technology to scan the brains of study participants were able to observe that “The first pairing or association between an object and a smell had a distinct signature in the brain... We expected a unique representation of initial or ‘first’ olfactory associations, but did not expect that it would materialize even in cases where the behavioral evidence did not indicate a stronger memory.” The research could eventually help scientists boost memories, Yeshurun said. “Perhaps more importantly, it may help us generate methods to better forget early and powerful memories, such as trauma.”

This new research also gives us insight into Isaac’s words after smelling Jacob’s clothing: “See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field” (27:27). While Isaac could no longer see with his eyes, the scent of the clothing instantly returned Isaac to a time before his eyes failed him, when he could clearly see his son. ■

## Paying the Price for Stalling

### **Veyashavta imo yamim achadim – “Tarry with him a few days” (Genesis 27:44)**

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After coercing her son Jacob to steal Esau’s blessing, Rebecca learned of Esau’s rage and his plans to kill his brother in revenge. Determined to prevent this from happening, she decided to send Jacob to her brother Laban until Esau calmed down. Rebecca told Jacob, “Tarry with him a few days, until your brother’s fury turn[s] away.” Yet, Jacob did not spend a few days away, but rather 22 years. Professor Nathan Aviezer explained that Rebecca lost contact with her beloved Jacob as a punishment for her deceitful behavior. Instead of telling her husband the truth about why she wanted to send Jacob away, she contrived the excuse of sending him to find a wife. Due to her deceit, she suffered the punishment of never again seeing her beloved son.

Clearly Iran did not learn from Rebecca’s example so long ago. Copying Rebecca’s method of using deceit as a stalling tactic, the Islamic Republic is hoping to buy time while it attempts to perfect its nuclear weapons program.

As it has done in the past, Iran is now dragging out nuclear talks as it continues its illicit enrichment of uranium. Iran has not rejected an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) proposal – backed by the United States, France and Russia – to process a portion of its low enriched uranium (LEU) outside the country, but rather has offered its own proposal in order to stretch out the negotiations. The Islamic Republic is now proposing to send only a small portion of its LEU out of the country, thus maintaining the possibility of using its existing stockpile to produce a nuclear weapon. One indication that Iran continues to pursue nuclear weapons is that the IAEA recently asked Iran to explain evidence suggesting that Iranian scientists have experimented with an advanced nuclear warhead design, according to a report in *The Guardian*. As a previously unpublished IAEA dossier states, Iranian scientists may have tested high-explosive components of the warhead design. In response to the revelation, Israel’s deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon, said that “If Iranian behavior and conduct continues as they have exhibited so far, it is obvious that their intentions are only to buy time and procrastinate.” For more on Iran, visit [www.aipac.org/Iran](http://www.aipac.org/Iran).

Unfortunately, Rebecca learned the steep price of using subterfuge as a stalling tactic the hard way. Unless Iran realizes that its best interests are served by abandoning its nuclear weapons program, it too will learn that there is a heavy price to be paid – in the form of severe economic sanctions. ■