

NOVEMBER 23, 2009

Parshat Vayetze

Warranted Suspicion

Vayehi baboker vehinei hi Leah – “It came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah” (Genesis 29:25)

The word *vehinei* connotes surprise – “behold” something happened that we did not expect. Yet, logic seems to defy the surprise implied in this verse. How could Jacob spend his entire wedding night with Leah, the sister of his beloved Rachel, without learning her true identity? Knowing Laban’s inner-nature, Jacob knew that he could not trust his future father-in-law and feared some type of deception on his wedding night. For this reason, he created with Rachel a system that he thought would save him from Laban’s trickery. Rashi explains that “Jacob gave signals to Rachel. [Yet] when Rachel realized that they were taking Leah to the wedding she said [to herself], ‘My sister will be shamed.’ So she gave over the signals to [Leah].”

Similar to Jacob, who suspected that Laban would try to deceive him on their wedding night, the international community has good reason to suspect that Iran is acting deceptively by hiding additional undisclosed nuclear facilities.

International inspectors, who gained access to Iran’s newly revealed underground nuclear enrichment plant near Qom, voiced strong suspicions in a recently released report that the country was concealing other atomic facilities, the New York Times reported. The report said Iran had told the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it had begun building the bunkered site in 2007, but the IAEA had evidence the project had begun in 2002, paused in 2004 and resumed in 2006. Iran revealed the site’s existence in September 2009. “The agency has indicated (to Iran) that its declaration of the new facility reduces the level of confidence in the absence of other nuclear facilities under construction and gives rise to questions about whether there were any other nuclear facilities not declared to the agency,” the report said.

Iran’s failure to meet an Oct. 23 deadline to accept an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) proposal to process a portion of Iran’s nuclear materials outside the country represents yet another example of Iran’s long history of delaying tactics. President Obama has said the United States will not continue talking with Tehran if it follows its long history of deception and stalling, saying, “If Iran does not take steps in the near future to live up to its obligations, then the United States will not continue to negotiate indefinitely, and we are prepared to move towards increased pressure.”

Like Laban’s dealings with Jacob, Iran has given the international community ample reason to suspect subterfuge and deceit. The United States must not let the deceit continue and work to impose the harsh economic sanctions that will compel Iran to disclose and curtail its nuclear activity. ■

Sharing Sheep Know-How

Vayechemu hatzon el hamaklot – “The flocks conceived at the sight of the rods” (Genesis 30:39)

After Jacob arrived at his agreement with Laban to take the spotted and speckled sheep as salary for his years of dedicated service, the text describes in great detail (verses 37 – 39) the methods Jacob employed to increase his flock.

Jacob utilized staffs and sticks to “warm” the flock and instigate the miraculous birth of huge numbers of spotted and speckled sheep. Ramban (on verse 37) notes that while Jacob has this unique knowledge, which enabled him to increase his flocks, “Laban was unaware of this birthing method” and his shepherds did not suspect anything when they saw the unusual sticks.

Although Jacob was forced to withhold his unique agricultural expertise from his uncle in order to receive remuneration owed to him, the Israeli government proudly shares effective Israeli technologies that assist Arabs, Bedouin and Druze farmers in managing their sheep and goat herds.

The Israeli Ministry of Agriculture has given partial funding to Arab, Druze and Bedouin farmers in Israel to acquire a computerized milking system for their flocks, the website Israel21c reported. The new technology, produced by Israeli company Afimilk, uses computer tagging to, “measure and record data such as milk yield, bacteria indication and the temperature of each animal and relays it to a central computer so that the farmer can make both day-to-day and strategic decisions about the herd.” These decisions, such as when to mate or “dry” an animal, have great implications for both the animal’s health and productivity. The technology not only dramatically decreases milking times, but also increases the milk yield by as much as 50%.

While Jacob needed divine dreams to teach him the necessary methods to increase his flocks, Israeli companies today have harnessed the power of modern technology to enhance animal management techniques not only in Israel, but around the world. ■

No Shame

Mah pishi u’mah chatati – “What is my crime and what is my sin...” (Genesis 31:36)

After Jacob quietly departed Haran with his family, Laban chased Jacob, accused him of stealing his idols and began searching tent-to-tent for the contraband. In a long outburst (verses 36-42), Jacob finally responded to Laban’s twenty years of abuse. Laban had long taken advantage of his pure-minded and honest son-in-law, overworking him and failing to pay him in kind. Professor Nechama Leibowitz wrote that “the pent-up feelings of twenty years of Laban’s underhanded dealings with him found their outlet in Jacob’s parting outburst.” To Jacob, Laban’s accusations of theft represented the height of hypocrisy. After being cheated for so long, Jacob could hardly believe that his oppressor was now accusing him of the very disingenuousness behavior Laban had himself perpetrated.

Like Jacob, accused by a known swindler of cheating, Israel, after having acted to protect human rights finds itself accused of trampling human rights. Israel has been accused of committing war crimes during a conflict in which Israel expended unparalleled energy to protect the safety of the civilians Hamas intentionally put in harm’s way.

During the recent United Nations deliberations over the so-called Goldstone Report, which accuses Israel of violating human rights and committing war crimes during Operation Cast Lead, Col. Richard Kemp, former head of British forces in Afghanistan took issue with the essence of the report. He told the UN, “During Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli Defense Forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare. The IDF took extraordinary measures to give Gaza civilians notice of targeted areas, dropping over 2 million leaflets, and making over 100,000 phone calls. Many missions that could have taken out Hamas military capability were aborted to prevent civilian casualties. During the conflict, the IDF allowed huge amounts of humanitarian aid into Gaza. To deliver aid virtually into your enemy’s hands is, to the military tactician, normally quite unthinkable. But the IDF took on those risks.”

And yet, despite Israel’s historic efforts to protect the lives of Palestinian civilians endangered by Hamas, it now finds itself charged with crimes against humanity. Like Jacob’s outburst to Laban, Israel can only express incredulity and outrage that the UN Human Rights Commission, instead of applauding Israel’s efforts, accuses it of war crimes. As Jacob implied to Laban and Prime Minister Netanyahu said to the UN, “Have you no shame?” ■