

NOVEMBER 1, 2010

Parashat Toldot

Foolish Decisions

Behold I am at the point to die (Genesis 25:32)

הנה אנכי הולך למות (בראשית כה:לב)

What did Esau mean when he justified his decision to sell his birthright to his brother for a bowl of lentil soup by saying, “Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall the birthright do to me?” (25:32). Kli Yakkar (on 25:34) connects Esau’s comments to the soup itself. As lentils represent a food eaten in a house of mourning, through the soup Jacob conveyed to his brother that because Esau “daily entered into dens of wild animals, with his life hanging before him,” the birthright was of no use to him. After all, Esau would surely die long before he could avail himself of the birthright’s benefits. Agreeing with Jacob’s logic, Esau consented to sell his rights as firstborn to his younger brother—thereby forfeiting his inheritance.

Esau’s recklessness led him to sell his birthright and give up his opportunity to prosper financially. In this same vein, Iran’s irresponsible pursuit of nuclear weapons has stifled its own chances for economic growth.

Recently, Special Assistant to the President and National Security Council Senior Director for the Central Region Dennis Ross described the powerful effect of international economic sanctions upon the Iranian regime: “The combination of our diplomatic initiative and Iran’s behavior has helped build a broad-based international coalition that is now imposing significant pressure on Iran to change its behavior.” Yet, despite these sanctions, Iran has pressed on with its nuclear development program. After talks in Washington, senior U.S. and Israeli officials said in a joint statement that Iran’s nuclear program, along with its support of anti-Israel militant groups, are of “grave concern,” and they pledged to keep Iran from acquiring atomic weapons, the [Associated Press](#) reported. “It is clear that Iran is among the greatest challenges we face today in the Middle East,” read the statement from Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Daniel Ayalon. “Iran’s continued noncompliance with its international obligations related to its nuclear program, as well as its continued support for terrorist entities, are of grave concern to our two countries and the entire international community.” For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

While engaging in dangerous behavior, Esau ignored his own self-interests by selling his birthright for a bowl of soup. Iran is now replicating Esau’s mistake, making destructive decisions that not only diminish the possibility of future Iranian prosperity, but also threaten the safety and stability of the Middle East. ■

Toothless Agreements

And Abimelech went to him from Gerar (Genesis 26:26)

ואבימלך הלך אליו מגרר (בראשית כו:כו)

After ejecting Isaac from his lands for achieving too much prosperity, the Philistine leader Abimelech sued Isaac for a covenant of peace. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch notes that in reality this new agreement should have been superfluous as Abimelech had already made a covenant with Abraham that was binding for generations (see Genesis 21:22). Hirsch notes the irony of the situation, “Although [Abimelech] himself had broken faith with the son of

Abraham and had been unfaithful to the covenant made with the father, he still placed value on obtaining a covenant confirmed by an oath from the son.”

Like Abimelech, who seemingly had no problem breaking his own agreements, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is now considering renegeing on its commitments to Israel.

The PA recently indicated that if the peace process broke down, the Palestinians could break the Oslo Accords that marked the opening of peace negotiations with Israel. “Most probably, we will abandon the Palestinian obligations that resulted from these accords...” declared Ahmed Majdalani, a senior member of the PA. According to the [Jerusalem Post](#), Yasser Abed Rabbo, a top advisor to PA President Mahmoud Abbas, recently stated that “We can’t remain committed to the agreements that were signed with Israel forever.” However, according to the same *Jerusalem Post* article, “One Israeli government source said there was an ‘internal contradiction’ in the various Palestinian threats of alternative courses of action... ‘They are the ones avoiding the direct talks, and then are the ones saying that the talks are not working and other solutions are needed,’ the source said. ‘They can’t have their cake and eat it, too.’” For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Sadly, rather than returning to the negotiating table in an honest attempt to achieve peace, the PA is considering Abimelech’s approach to past agreements. In doing so they are ignoring the fact that true peace can only be achieved in direct bilateral negotiations between the two parties. ■

Hairy Situations

Come near please, that I may feel you (Genesis 27:21)

גשה נא אלי ואמשך (בראשית כז:כא)

Isaac was suspicious when his son returned far too quickly with the food he had requested and asked for a blessing. His son’s unlikely speed caused Isaac to doubt his identity. How then did Isaac distinguish the person before him whose “voice was the voice of Jacob” (27:22)? He felt the hair on his arm. Yet, Ohr Hachayyim wonders: if the voice seemed to sound like Jacob but the “hands were the hands of Esau,” why did Isaac follow that one piece of evidence (the hair) over another (the voice) and proceed to give Jacob the blessing? Ohr Hachayyim explains that Isaac trusted the ‘hands of Esau,’ because “the voice can change—which is not true of the feeling of the hair on the arms, which is a definitive sign.”

While Isaac mistakenly believed that by examining the hair he could determine the true identity of the person before him, an Israeli researcher has discovered that hair can teach us a great deal about identity—and health.

According to several important studies by Israeli-Canadian researcher Dr. Gideon Koren, hair can offer incredible insight into peoples’ lifestyles, such as whether a person has been under stress or is at greater risk of a heart attack. According to the website [Israel21c.com](#), Koren’s research has helped to divulge fascinating secrets locked in our hair. Following a study by a colleague of his that proved that cortisol is present in human hair, Koren decided to study the relationship between cortisol levels and levels of stress. He discovered that depending on hair length, a doctor could determine how much stress a person has been under for the previous six months. According to Koren, “As cortisol is a known biomarker for stress, and because hair grows about .4 inches a month, I thought this was a great opportunity to measure chronic stress over time,” adding that his research has led to a new biological marker that “can be used to help prevent heart attacks.”

Isaac looked to his son’s hair in order to know who deserved his blessing. Today, Dr. Koren hopes his research of hair will increase our understanding of human stress and ultimately prevent illness—which would truly prove to be a blessing to us all. ■