

NOVEMBER 8, 2010

Parashat Vayitzei

Historical Connection

And Jacob left Beersheba (Genesis 28:10)

ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע (בראשית כח:י)

In Jacob's travel from Beersheba to Haran, a city directly to the east of Biblical Israel, he traveled north, stopping at Mount Moriah in Jerusalem (see Rashi on 28:11). Why did Jacob make this detour? Chizkuni (on 28:17) explains that on Jacob's journey away from Israel, "He followed the path that Abraham his grandfather followed from Ur Kasdim down to Beersheba...and [he stopped] in a number of the places that Abraham and Isaac settled along the way." Thus, Jacob's historical connection led him on his circuitous route to reach his destination.

Jacob felt a deep personal connection to Jerusalem that compelled him to visit the holy city. Thousands of years later, Jews continue to feel that same bond to the city that now serves as the undivided capital of the state of Israel.

For more than three millennia Jews have maintained a constant presence in Jerusalem, and the city has played a central role in the lives of the Jewish people. Following its war of independence in 1948, the centuries-old Jewish dream of reclaiming Jerusalem was partially realized, when the western half of the city was made the capital of a re-established Israel. Jews had formed a majority of Jerusalem's population since the 1860s, and the founders of Israel had wanted to make the entire city the reborn nation's capital. However, it was divided after the Jordanian army succeeded in occupying eastern Jerusalem. After the conflict ended, a barrier cut through the city's center along the armistice line. Thousands of Jews, some of whose families had been living there for centuries, were expelled from eastern Jerusalem. Arab soldiers even desecrated the graves of Jews buried on the Mount of Olives. The city was finally reunited during the Six-Day War of 1967. Israel immediately abolished Arab restrictions on access to the city, allowing all Jews, Christians and Muslims to worship at their holy places. For more on Jerusalem, click [here](#).

Jacob went out of his way to renew his personal connection with Jerusalem, a place dear to his forefathers. We must remember Jacob's personal connection as we look to the future of our own ties to the holy city. ■

Shared Values

And they seemed to him but a few days (Genesis 29:20)

ויהיו בעיניו כימים אחדים (בראשית כט:כ)

We read that the seven years that Jacob worked for the right to marry Rachel "seemed to him but a few days in his love for her" (29:20). Logic, one might assume, should provoke the exact opposite sentiment. Why, then, did it only seem like a short time? Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt explained that in reality there are two types of love. The first kind of love cleaves the lover to the beloved in the yearning for the positive feelings he or she will derive from their relationship. In this type of love, every hour of separation evokes pain and anguish. The second, and truer, love does not demand reciprocation. Instead, it represents a mutual identification and connection that is independent of physical proximity. Jacob experienced this second kind of love for Rachel. For this reason, Jacob's love endured despite the forced separation, with his years of service feeling like mere days.

Just as Jacob's powerful bond to Rachel was rooted in pure love rather than the expectation of personal gain, America's strong support for the state of Israel does not depend on expected benefit, but rather on the shared values of democracy, freedom and self-determination.

The values shared by the U.S. and Israel emphasize the deep roots of the longstanding friendship. Both nations were founded by refugees seeking political and religious freedoms. Both were forced to fight for independence against foreign powers and both have absorbed waves of immigrants seeking political freedom and economic well-being. These common standards ensure that the alliance continues to flourish, and that the newly elected 112th Congress will continue America's long tradition of staunch support for a strong, safe and secure Israel.

The incoming Congress marks a shift in the balance of political power in Washington. Yet, despite this swing, America's support for Israel remains steadfast. Polls show that more than two-thirds of Americans hold a favorable view of Israel, and Americans across a wide range of demographic groups strongly identify with the Jewish state. Support for a strong Israel is not limited by partisan allegiance—for the past half-century both major parties' platforms have featured strong affirmations of the value of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Republican and Democratic presidents and lawmakers have worked to strengthen the bond between the two nations. However, we cannot take this support for granted. With at least 93 newly elected members of the House of the Representatives and 16 newly elected Senators, now is the time to reach out to these representatives and urge them to visit Israel and come speak in our synagogues about why they support the U.S.-Israel relationship.

Like the strong relationship between Jacob and Rachel, the U.S.-Israel bond has stood the test of time. As America ushers in a new Congress, we must ensure that our elected representatives will continue the long tradition of respect, admiration and support that is the cornerstone of the relationship between the United States and our most reliable ally in the Middle East. ■

Extending Our Hands in Peace

Jacob said to his brothers gather stones (Genesis 31:46) (בראשית לא:מד) ייאמר יעקב לאחיו לקטו אבנים

Netziv (in the commentary Ha'amek Davar on 31:46) wonders why Jacob instructed his sons (who the Torah referred to his as his brothers, see Rashi on 31:46) to collect the stones for the monument which would represent his covenant with Laban. Why did Jacob not ask his servants to collect the stones for him? Netziv answers, "In this matter was the attribute of Jacob to dwell securely and peacefully with men. Despite the fact that Laban had persecuted him...he chased after peace and made a concerted effort to bring [Laban] close to his heart. He also wished to teach his children this wondrous attribute." Therefore, Jacob went through the trouble of collecting the stones himself—and also of instructing his sons to join him—in his aim to impart upon them his desire for peace and his willingness to take the extra measures to attain that goal.

Like Jacob, who made a grand gesture toward peace, Israel has taken massive steps to boost the West Bank economy in her continued efforts to achieve peace with the Palestinians.

In recent years Israel has undertaken immense confidence building measures to reassure the Palestinian Authority (PA) of its genuine desire for peace, including the removal of more than 400 West Bank checkpoints and roadblocks—improving the freedom of movement for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. These actions, combined with Israeli-supported U.S. assistance in funding and training PA security forces, have vastly improved the West Bank's security situation, leading to an increased standard of living throughout the area. Now, Israeli Arab shoppers are flocking to West Bank cities, and last year there was a 30 percent increase in housing and business real estate projects. The gross domestic product in the West Bank's Palestinian areas also grew by more than nine percent in the last year, and the PA stock market's al-Quds Index increased by nearly 12 percent.

Jacob took active steps to ensure peaceful coexistence with Laban. In modern times, Israel has been following Jacob's example in her incredible work to better the economy of the West Bank in hopes of creating a climate for peace. ■