

OCTOBER 18, 2010

Parashat Vayera

Time is of the Essence

And Abraham hurried to the tent (Genesis 18:6)

וימהר אברהם האהלה (בראשית יח:ו)

In the opening chapter of our *parashah*, the Torah repeatedly describes the enthusiasm with which Abraham served his guests, stating “And he [Abraham] ran to greet them” (18:2); “And Abraham hurried” (18:6); “And to the cattle Abraham ran” (18:7) as well as, “and he hurried [the youth] to make [the meat]” (18:7). Why was Abraham in such a rush? According to the Midrash (Midrash Hachefetz), Abraham hurried to best serve his guests because he considered attending to others to be a priority: “Look at how precious these *mitzvot* were to Abraham and the people of his household.”

Abraham’s example demonstrates that when matters are dear to us, we must perform them with special diligence and alacrity. Today, his rush to serve others stands as an important benchmark for confronting the potential of a nuclear Iran. Like Abraham, we too must hurry—not only because Israel’s security is critically important to us, but because time is of the essence.

With Congress’ passage of the most comprehensive and toughest Iran sanctions legislation to date, along with sanctions approved by the United Nations, European Union and other countries, Iran has begun to feel the impact. Scores of insurers, banks and energy companies have halted their business with the Islamic Republic. Yet, despite these pressures, Tehran continues to advance its nuclear program. In fact, the International Atomic Energy Agency has stated that Iran now has enough low-enriched uranium to build up to three nuclear weapons. While sanctions are having an important impact, the United States cannot rest until Iran ceases uranium enrichment and abandons its aspirations for nuclear weapons. The United States must continue to exert strong pressure on companies doing business with Iran, and fully enforce U.S. laws that penalize companies and individuals investing in Iran’s energy sector, selling Iran refined petroleum, aiding Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or facilitating Tehran’s illicit financial activity. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Abraham realized that when something is truly important, time is of the essence. The United States has taken positive steps in recognizing the dangerous potential of a nuclear Iran by approving sanctions to confront the Islamic Republic. For these measures to be truly effective, they must be implemented and enforced without delay. ■

An Israeli Initiative for Women’s Health

And Sarah laughed within herself (Genesis 18:12)

ותצחק שרה בקרבה (בראשית יח:יב)

When Sarah, at the advanced age of 90, heard the angel promise her that she would give birth to a son, she instinctively “laughed within herself” (18:12). While many people believe that Sarah found humor in the notion that a woman of her years might bear a child, Rashi states that Sarah laughed because she was very aware of her own physical condition. Rather than translating the word *b’kirbah* as “within herself,” Rashi understands it to mean that she laughed “at her insides.” Accordingly, “She examined her [body] and said, ‘Is it possible for these insides to carry a child?’”

Rashi's explanation of Sarah's experience highlights the importance of awareness when it comes to women's health issues. In this vein, a new Israeli collaborative is working hard to both promote awareness of breast cancer, and find new approaches to breast cancer prevention and treatment.

This month Israel will host a week of events marking the launch of the Israel Breast Cancer Collaborative. This enterprise, which marks a major partnership between Susan G. Komen for the Cure and non-governmental organizations in Israel, is focused on examining new scientific approaches to breast cancer prevention and treatment, as well as enhancing advocacy, awareness, screening and treatment of breast cancer. In addition, the Old City of Jerusalem will serve host to the first-ever Israeli "Race for the Cure," Komen's signature fundraising walk. "We're hoping to get 10,000 people of all shapes, sizes, colors and religious denominations to Jerusalem," says coordinator Rena Riger. "Nothing like this has ever been done in Israel." The problem of breast cancer is particularly relevant in Israel, where it is the most common form of women's cancers, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all new cancer cases in the country. "In terms of breast cancer R&D [research and development], Israel is in the top five in the world," Riger states. "We are medically very advanced."

Reading about Sarah's awareness of her own physical well-being serves as a reminder to us all of how important women's health truly is—from the remarkable act of giving birth to the complex issues of illnesses like breast cancer. Israel's new initiative to enhance breast-cancer awareness represents an important effort to follow in Sarah's footsteps. ■

Choosing to Communicate

And Abraham reproved Abimelech (Genesis 21:25)

והוכח אברהם את אבימלך (בראשית כא:כה)

The Torah describes how Abimelech approached Abraham in order to enter into an agreement of peace between their two peoples, and how Abraham agreed and took an oath (see 21:23-24). However, immediately after we read of this vow, the text states: "And Abraham had a dispute with Abimelech..." (21:25), referring to an argument over water. Why did Abraham rebuke Abimelech specifically at this point of agreement? According to Radak (on 21:25), Abraham was able to raise the issue because the two had just entered into a treaty together, and therefore were able to speak freely with one another: "Because they entered into an oath and a covenant, he made his claim against him for the action [of theft committed by Abimelech's servants]."

Ultimately, Abraham and Abimelech were able to address difficult topics by confronting those issues and speaking directly. Nowadays, the Palestinian Authority's (PA) leadership must understand this critical message.

Over the course of the past 18 months Israel has offered numerous goodwill gestures to assure the PA of its sincere desire to achieve peace, including calling for a Palestinian state, reducing barriers to movement in the West Bank, and implementing an unprecedented 10-month moratorium on housing construction in the West Bank. Unfortunately, PA President Mahmoud Abbas refused to engage in direct talks with Israel until the ninth month of the moratorium and then claimed that talks could not continue if the moratorium was not renewed. However, there is no justification for Abbas to leave the talks. There cannot be a negotiated two-state solution if Abbas refuses to negotiate, and if the talks end, it is because Abbas decided to end them. Direct talks without conditions are the only path to two states—a Jewish state of Israel and a demilitarized Palestinian state—living side-by-side in peace and security. Despite claims that construction in the West Bank demonstrates that Israel does not sincerely want peace, settlements have never been the impediment to a peace agreement—and are not now. In fact, Israel has removed settlers from the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank. To learn more about key principles of the peace process, click [here](#).

Direct negotiations offer the only means for arriving at a comprehensive peace. Abraham's confrontation of Abimelech demonstrates that tough issues can be resolved, but only if the parties are committed to working together to find a mutually agreeable resolution. ■