

NOVEMBER 21, 2011

Parashat Toldot

Detrimental Unity

Two nations are in your womb (Genesis 25:23)

שני גוים בבטןך (בראשית כה:כג)

Even before their birth, Esau and Jacob seemed destined to live diametrically opposite lives. Rebecca sensed this intuitively when the children “struggled together within her [womb]” in a seemingly unnatural manner. What was so odd about their movements? Rashi (on 25:22) explains that “when she passed by the doors of the Torah Academy of Shem and Ever, Jacob would run [in the womb] and struggle to emerge. When she passed by the doors of a house of idolatry, Esau would struggle to emerge.” Clearly the children she carried not only differed in temperament and attitude, but they also had divergent outlooks that caused them to struggle with each-other even before they were born.

In many ways Jacob and Esau’s struggle demonstrates that peaceful coexistence requires a unified worldview. As the Palestinian Authority and Hamas recently declared their intention to reconcile, one cannot help but wonder what worldview they share.

Palestinian officials recently announced that Fatah, the political party of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and Hamas, the internationally recognized terrorist organization, agreed to hold elections next May in what would be a major step toward ending a four-year rift, [The Associated Press](#) reported. However, the exact nature of a Fatah-Hamas unity government remains unclear as many of the rival factions’ policies contradict one another. One clear example is Fatah’s stated goal of seeking a peace agreement with Israel, while Hamas is sworn to the destruction of the Jewish state. As [The Washington Post](#) noted, because Hamas refuses to renounce violence, recognize Israel’s right to exist, and accept previous agreements, “Any government that includes Hamas would also be shunned by Israel and the West, which have both branded the group a terrorist organization.” For more information on Hamas, click [here](#).

Because Jacob and Esau represented wholly contradictory worldviews, they struggled to coexist even in the womb. Fatah and Hamas’ efforts to reconcile clearly demonstrate that while they might fight for control of the Palestinian government, they both reject any serious effort to reach a negotiated settlement with Israel. ■

Ready for Peace

And they departed from him in peace (Genesis 26:31)

ויילכו מאתו בשלום (בראשית כו:לא)

Despite having established a peace covenant with Abraham which explicitly included Abraham’s “grandchildren and great-grandchildren” (Genesis 21:23), Abimelech, king of Gerar, expelled Isaac from his kingdom and subsequently mistreated Isaac and his servants. When Abimelech inexplicably approached Isaac to reestablish the peace, Isaac wondered aloud why the king sought this peace, “seeing [that] you hate me” (26:27). Despite the mistreatment, though, Isaac agreed to reaffirm his father’s covenant, swearing an oath of friendship with Abimelech and his people.

When Isaac overlooked Abimelech’s aggression in order to reach a peace accord, he set an example which Israel strives to follow today. Israel has repeatedly expressed her readiness to overlook even continuing acts of aggression in order to reach a permanent agreement with the Palestinian people, and a chance to finally live in peace.

Time and again the Jewish state has demonstrated her willingness to make sacrifices for peace. In 1979 Israel withdrew her forces and uprooted Jewish settlers in the Sinai Peninsula to achieve peace with Egypt. Since then, Israel has left her positions in the Gaza Strip, parts of the West Bank and south Lebanon to reach peace with her neighbors. At present, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to call for direct talks without preconditions with the Palestinian Authority (PA), only to be rebuffed by PA President Mahmoud Abbas. And now the Quartet, comprised of the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia, has also “failed in its latest bid to resume peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians,” [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The Palestinians said they were disappointed that Israel had not heeded their call to freeze settlement construction, accept the 1967 borders, and the demand that Israel release Palestinian prisoners. However, “Israel remains ready for the immediate resumption of peace talks without preconditions,” an Israeli official said. “Israel is disappointed that the Palestinians have not picked up the ball.” For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Despite the inevitable challenges that the Israelis and Palestinians would face in talks, Israel remains unwavering in her commitment to returning to the negotiating table—just as Isaac was when he realized the ultimate value of reaching peace with Abimelech. ■

Patience of Evil

Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand (Genesis 27:41) (יקרבו ימי אבל אבי (בראשית כז:מא))

According to the Torah, Esau committed to wait until his father died before exacting revenge on Jacob for stealing his blessing. Why did Esau feel compelled to wait until the death of his father Isaac? The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah) explains the sinister motivation behind Esau’s decision: “Esau said, ‘Cain was a fool for killing his brother during his father’s lifetime...not taking into consideration that his father would be fruitful and multiply. I will not make that mistake.’” Thus, Esau clearly had it in mind to not only kill Jacob, but also to destroy his legacy. Nechama Leibowitz notes (New Studies in Bereishit p. 283) that the Midrash “paints a black picture of human progress, conceived in terms of the continuous perfecting of methods of killing human beings,” and points out that “The latest exponent of Jew-hatred always promises never to make the mistake of his predecessor, but effect a ‘final solution.’”

The patience that Esau showed in his plans to kill Jacob is made even more disturbing by the fact that he did not make this decision out of respect for his father, but rather in the hopes of permanently destroying any future Jewish people. Having declared its destructive intentions towards Israel and the Jewish people, Iran exhibits a similarly frightening patience and intent.

Angered by the release of an incriminating United Nations report on their nuclear activity, Iran’s leaders sought to cast it as an American fabrication, [The New York Times](#) reported. They denounced its chief author, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Yukiya Amano, as a “Washington stooge” and vowed that their country would not be bullied into abandoning its nuclear program. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad led the verbal assault on the report, saying it had been orchestrated by Iran’s enemies, principally the United States, which he said had dictated the report’s findings. “Why do you exploit the IAEA dignity in favor of the U.S. administration?” Mr. Ahmadinejad asked rhetorically in a question directed at Amano. The tone of their reaction suggested that Iran’s leaders were worried that the report could sway world opinion and deepen isolation of Iran, complicating its repeated claims that the goal of the nuclear program is not a military one. Now, the United States and our allies must immediately impose devastating sanctions on Iran to dissuade the regime from continuing its nuclear program. For more on the IAEA report, click [here](#).

Sadly, after thousands of years, Esau’s legacy continues to live on in those who desire to destroy Jacob’s descendants. The world should heed the IAEA’s warning, and impose new sanctions on Iran before it is too late. ■