

NOVEMBER 7, 2011

Parashat Vayera

Sarah's Greatest Wish

Behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son (Genesis 18:10)

והנה בן לשרה אשתך (בראשית יח:י)

Parashat Vayera chronicles Sarah's desperate desire to bear a child, and the divine intervention that ultimately fulfilled her wish. When Sarah overheard the angels tell Abraham that in one year's time "Sarah your wife shall have a son" (18:10), all Sarah could do was laugh. Rashi notes that Sarah laughed "within herself" because she "looked at her loins and said, 'can these innards possibly carry a child?'" Just as we innately sense the pain of her infertility, we also laugh with her as she realizes the seemingly impossible dream of bearing a child at such an advanced age. Noting the joy of laughter inherent in Isaac's name, Sarah says, "God has made laughter for me; every one that hears will laugh..." (21:6).

The focus throughout our *parashah* on Sarah's struggle with her infertility highlights the suffering of thousands of Israeli women who struggle with their own infertility. Thankfully, Israel goes to great lengths to help infertile women realize the dream of bearing a child.

Calling Israel "the world capital of in vitro fertilization [IVF]," [The New York Times](#) reported in July that "Israel provides free, unlimited IVF procedures for up to two 'take-home babies' until a woman is 45, a policy which has made Israelis the highest per capita users of the procedure in the world." Israel has long been a world leader both in fertility technology and utilization, offering women, regardless of race or religion, the opportunity to bear children. "A survey published by the journal *Human Reproduction Update* in 2002 showed that 1,657 in vitro fertilization procedures per million people per year were performed in Israel, compared with 899 in Iceland, the country with the second highest rate." This month Israel took another step to ease the difficult process of medically-assisted childbirth by establishing regulations allowing ova donations at hospitals across the country. Previously, a "serious shortage of eggs...had been forcing couples to go abroad and pay large sums for the ova," [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported.

As we recall the adversity that Sarah faced in her inability to bear a child, we must also remember that that same pain endures today as women suffer Sarah's very frustration. It is with the knowledge of that pain in mind that we marvel at Israel's efforts to harness technology in order to help countless women realize the miracle of motherhood. ■

Willingness to Compromise

To do charity and justice (Genesis 18:19)

לעשות צדקה ומשפט (בראשית יח:יט)

According to the Torah, before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah God described the amazing nature of Abraham, saying "For I have known him [Abraham], to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord doing charity and justice." The sages in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 6b) noted that these two qualities, charity and justice, can have conflicting attributes. How did Abraham reconcile these two ideas? "What is justice that has in it charity and kindness? This must refer to a negotiated compromise." Advancing this concept, Rambam (Laws of Sanhedrin 24:4) codifies compromise as the ideal form of justice, writing that "A court that always [first seeks] compromise—this is [a] praiseworthy approach."

Just as Judaism extols compromise as the best resolution to any dispute, Israel has consistently sought to resolve its conflict with the Palestinian people through dialogue and mutual agreement. Sadly, instead of joining Israel at the negotiating table, the Palestinians have opted for unilateral actions that make peace even more difficult to achieve.

Time and again Israel has demonstrated its willingness to make tough sacrifices for peace. In 1979 Israel withdrew its forces and uprooted Jewish settlers in the Sinai Peninsula to achieve peace with Egypt, and later abandoned positions in the Gaza Strip, parts of the West Bank and South Lebanon to achieve peace with its neighbors. Yet, despite Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's repeated calls for direct talks without preconditions with the Palestinian Authority (PA), he has been repeatedly rejected by PA President Mahmoud Abbas, who seems determined to seek unilateral international recognition instead of a negotiated settlement with Israel. Recently, the Palestinians accelerated their efforts by seeking full membership in UNESCO, the United Nations Education Science and Culture Organization, which voted in favor of giving the Palestinians full membership in the body, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The vote, which will boost the Palestinian bid for recognition as a state at the U.N., came despite strong United States opposition. David T. Killion, U.S. ambassador to UNESCO, told journalists after the vote that "the U.S. has been clear for the need of a two-state resolution, but the only path is through direct negotiations and there are no shortcuts, and initiatives like [this one] are counterproductive." For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Israel's consistent willingness to make painful compromises for peace reflects the long-held Jewish tradition of preferring dialogue and compromise over dispute and conflict. Yet, compromise requires a willing partner. The continual rebuffing of American efforts to resume peace talks, while seeking to circumvent negotiations in favor of unilateral moves at the U.N., makes one wonder if Mahmoud Abbas truly is that willing partner. ■

A Loud Warning

Abraham, Abraham (Genesis 22:11)

אברהם אברהם (בראשית כב:יא)

The Torah relates that when Abraham, standing over Isaac on Mount Moriyah, stretched out his arm with a knife to slaughter his beloved son, an angel of God called out from the heavens, "Abraham, Abraham" (22:11). Why did the angel call Abraham by name twice? The Midrash (Pesikta Rabati chapter 40) gives a simple but critical explanation: "For [Abraham] was hastening to slaughter [Isaac] and [the angel] screamed at him like a person crying out in anguish, 'What are you doing?'" The angel not only called Abraham twice, but also raised its voice to capture Abraham's complete attention, preventing him from actually slaughtering his son.

Just as the angel raised its voice to get Abraham's attention and prevent him from causing irrevocable damage, Israel recently "raised its voice" in an effort to warn the world of Iran's continued development of nuclear weapons.

As part of a renewed diplomatic offensive aimed at using new sanctions to stop Tehran from developing a nuclear bomb, Israeli ambassadors in Western nations have been instructed to inform politicians that the window of opportunity to impose effective sanctions on Iran is closing, [Haaretz](#) recently reported. "The significant progress that has taken place on all the components of the Iranian nuclear program should be emphasized, especially uranium enrichment," said a classified cable sent to Israeli ambassadors worldwide. Israel is working to raise global awareness of Iran's atomic progress and is urging the United States, European Union member states and other Western allies to impose crippling sanctions on Iran to prevent it from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. "There's a feeling that even though the sanctions are harming Iran, the technological timetable is faster than the diplomatic timetable," a Foreign Ministry official said. "Now is the time to intensify the steps against Iran." The sanctions campaign comes ahead of the planned November 8th release of an International Atomic Energy Agency report which is expected to bring proof that Iran is attempting to build a nuclear bomb. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

The angel crying out "Abraham Abraham" caught his attention and stopped him from slaughtering his only son. The international community must heed this lesson by responding to Israel's impassioned calls for immediate, increased sanctions. If the world ignores this call, it may soon be too late to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon. ■

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