

OCTOBER 29, 2012

Parashat Vayera

Kindness Before Justice

Righteousness and justice (Genesis 18:19)

לעשות צדקה ומשפט (בראשית יח:יט)

According to the Torah, before destroying the city of Sodom, God informed Abraham about the coming calamity. “For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice” (18:19). The Midrash (Midrash Hagadol) describes the attributes that defined Abraham: “‘The way of the Lord’—this [refers to] acts of kindness; ‘righteousness’ (*tzedakah*)—is giving charity; ‘justice’ refers to the [work of the] judges; from here the rabbis taught that acts of kindness are greater than charity, and charity is greater than judgment.” Abraham’s greatness lay in the fact that he consistently valued charity and kindness ahead of strict justice. Even the evil city of Sodom deserved compassion and assistance.

Like Abraham, who placed compassion and charity above a strict interpretation of the law, Israel recently waved a law that previously would have not allowed for the sale of water purification tablets to needy Syrian refugees.

An Israeli law that was drafted in 1939 prohibits Israeli companies from knowingly selling products that end up benefitting an enemy state. Yet, according to the website Israel21c.org, the Israeli government recently waived this law in order to allow for the sale of water purification tablets that will greatly benefit refugees suffering from the ongoing violence and bloodshed in Syria. With clean water at an all-time low in Syria, the United Nations international aid agency UNICEF is working to rehabilitate the country’s water sources. UNICEF turned to Medentech, Israel Chemicals’ Ireland-based subsidiary, with a request to buy its AquaTabs water purification tablets. Medentech refused, citing Israeli law prohibiting Israeli companies from selling a product to a hostile state. Yet the humanitarian concern for the hundreds of thousands of suffering Syrian refugees trumped political concerns. Thus, Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinlitz authorized the sale of the tablets, to prevent the spread of cholera, typhoid, dysentery and other water-borne diseases throughout the refugee population. For more on Israel’s humanitarian acts all over the world, click [here](#).

Just as Abraham valued kindness and charity ahead of the strict standards of justice, Israel abandoned a law in order to help provide clean and safe water to hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. ■

A Covenant of Peace

So they made a covenant (Genesis 21:32)

ויכרתו ברית (בראשית כא:לב)

As the text uses the phrase “at that time” (21:22) it connects the story about the covenant between Abraham and the Philistine King Abimelech with the preceding story of when Abraham banished Ishmael from his home. What is the link between these two stories? Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (see *Michtav M’elياهو* vol. 2 p. 189) explains that as a man of kindness, “Abraham...certainly loved and pursued peace with all who surrounded him.” For this reason, after Abraham was forced to send Ishmael away, he relished the opportunity to make peace “and was overjoyed at the opportunity to establish a covenant with Abimelech.”

Abraham enjoyed peace with his neighbors and welcomed Abimelech with open arms. The state of Israel similarly welcomed the new incoming ambassadors from Jordan and Egypt.

Recently, incoming ambassadors from Egypt and Jordan presented their credentials to Israeli President Shimon Peres, both affirming their governments' desires to maintain their respective peace treaties with Israel and to further peace in the Middle East, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. "I came with the message of peace and I came to confirm that we are really working for mutual trust and transparency," Ambassador Atef Salem of Egypt told Peres at the President's Residence in Jerusalem. "We are committed to all the agreements we signed with Israel and we're also committed to the peace treaty with Israel." The arrival of the two new envoys—after a prolonged period in which both posts were vacant—appeared to mark a rare and significant positive step amid Israel's complex relations with its Arab neighbors. Following their presentation of credentials, Israel's Foreign Ministry said, this "will enhance bilateral relations and will help to develop cooperation for peace and economic prosperity, for the mutual benefit of all parties." The regular relations between the countries will make an essential contribution to regional stability and to the promotion of peace in the Middle East. For more on Israel's neighbors click [here](#).

Like Abraham, who cherished peace and welcomed the opportunity to establish a covenant with Abimelech, Israel, which has consistently sought peace with its neighbors, welcomed the new envoys from Jordan and Egypt as representatives of continued peaceful relations between the countries. ■

Walking Together for Israel

And both of them went together (Genesis 22:8)

וילכו שניהם יחדו (בראשית כב:ח)

Commentators wonder why the Torah needed to restate that Abraham and Isaac "went together" as they walked towards Mount Moriah. Rabbeinu Bechaya (22:8) explains that after Isaac wondered aloud about the identity of the mystery sacrifice saying "Where is lamb for a burnt offering" (22:7), Isaac soon realized that he was indeed intended to be his father's offering. Yet, he continued on the journey, walking with his father willingly. In relating that they "went together," the verse conveys that although each walked towards a very different destiny, nonetheless they walked together "with a single intention."

Instead of focusing on the differences, Abraham and Isaac "walked together" with a shared sense of purpose. During the heated election season, Americans find many things to disagree on, but when it comes to Israel both sides walk together and believe in a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

While American citizens, elected officials and candidates for office often deeply disagree about numerous ideological and political issues, we have joined together in our loud support for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship. American support for the Jewish state proves to be an overwhelmingly bipartisan topic. In the third and final presidential debate which focused on foreign policy, the two U.S. presidential candidates repeatedly spoke of their support for Israel and their intention never to let Iran acquire nuclear weapons, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. During the debate both candidates agreed on the need for tough economic pressure on Iran and said they would stand by Israel if it was attacked by Tehran. "If Israel is attacked, America will stand with Israel," President Barack Obama [said](#) when asked by moderator Bob Schieffer. GOP challenger Mitt Romney echoed Obama saying "if Israel is attacked, we have their back." President Obama referred to Israel as "a true friend and our greatest ally in the region." Governor Romney underscored the same point stating: "we will stand with Israel."

Although Abraham and Isaac had different intentions they still walked together toward Mount Moriah. The Republican and Democrat presidential candidates show that regardless of their differing visions, Americans all across the board plan to uphold and strengthen the United States' vital friendship with Israel. ■

Sermon tidbits are intended for your use without attribution. Please feel free to use some or all of the material. Although it is not necessary, it is appreciated if copies of sermons or articles that use the ideas presented here are sent to synagogue@aipac.org.