

OCTOBER 22, 2013

Parashat Chayei Sarah

Digging Deep

That he may give me the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:9) (ויתן לי את מערת המכפלה (בראשית כג:ט))

Why did Abraham bury his wife in a cave, and why did he choose to bury Sarah specifically in the Machpelah Cave? Rashi (see his commentary on 23:2 and 23:9) explains that the term *machpelah*, which connotes a “double” cave, alludes to a couple that had already been buried there, as the Midrash (Midrash Agadah) relates that Abraham discovered that Adam and Eve had been interred in the cave. Abraham recognized that from the time of creation, mankind had buried its loved ones in caves and wished to continue the practice for his family. This practice remained prevalent in the Holy Land for many centuries, with the Israelites digging burial caves in places like Tel Maresha.

For centuries Jews dug caves as a symbol of love for their deceased family members. Today, the Hamas regime in Gaza also digs deep into the ground, but for very different reasons.

Earlier this month, the Israeli Defense Forces discovered a massive tunnel dug by Hamas leading from the southern Gaza Strip well into Israel. [The Times of Israel](#) reported that Senior Hamas official Moussa Abu Marzouk confirmed the tunnels were intended to kidnap Israeli soldiers. The mile-long tunnel, buried up to 65 feet underground, took at least a year to build and used approximately 24,000 Israeli concrete slabs, which the IDF had permitted into Gaza to ease the crisis in civilian construction. Army sources noted that this was the third tunnel from Gaza into Israel discovered this year. Marzouk wrote on his Facebook page that “The tunnel which was revealed was extremely costly in terms of money, effort and blood. All of this is meaningless when it comes to freeing our heroic prisoners.” [The New York Times](#) reported that Hamas portrayed the discovery of the tunnel as “evidence that it had not dropped armed resistance and that it continued to prepare for the next round of fighting against Israel.” While Israel understandably suspended the flow of construction materials into Gaza, it announced that it would continue to allow the transfer of construction materials for projects overseen by international organizations.

The Israelites dug caves as a burial place for their loved ones. Sadly, the terrorist regime in Gaza digs tunnels not for love, but to bring terror and harm to the Jewish state. ■

Cheap Talk

And Abraham paid to Ephron (Genesis 23:16)

וישקל אברהם לעפרן (בראשית כג:טז)

Ephron’s name is usually spelled in this chapter in its full form—with a *vav* (עפרון). Why then is it spelled in this verse in its incomplete form (עפרן)? Rashi (on 23:16) explains that the missing letter reminds us of Ephron’s failure to act. Ephron spoke publicly in a grandiose manner about his willingness to give the Machpelah Cave to Abraham for free. Yet, in the end he charged Abraham an exorbitant sum for the land. Thus, explains Rashi, the Torah spells his name incompletely “For he said a lot, and did not even do a little bit.” In Ethics of the Fathers (1:15), Shammai teaches us to “speak little and do much.” It is not our speech, but our actions which define us.

Ephron spoke publicly about his willingness to give the Machpelah Cave to Abraham, however his actions did not match his words. The U.S. must ensure that the Islamic Republic does not take this same approach and that Iran's words are backed by verifiable actions.

Even before the recent direct negotiations between the United States and Iran in Geneva began, the Islamic Republic had already outlined red lines that it would not cross. According to [The Financial Times](#), Iran insisted that “it will not allow its current stocks of enriched uranium to be shipped out of the country as part of any deal.” Moreover, according to Reuel Marc Gerecht and Mark Dubowitz, senior fellows at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Iran has no intention of relinquishing its nuclear weapons program. Instead they [write](#) that, “Iranian leaders probably are entering these negotiations for one reason: to test Barack Obama's mettle. They want to see whether Tehran can have the bomb and sanctions relief.” With this in mind, members of Congress from both sides of the aisle have called on President Obama to enforce current sanctions against Iran, and that only if Iran takes significant steps to curtail its nuclear program can the United States consider easing sanctions. In a [recent letter to President Obama](#), a group of Democrat and Republican Senators said they were open to suspending the implementation of new sanctions on Iran but only if Tehran takes significant steps to slow its nuclear program. “If the Iranian government takes these steps in a verifiable and transparent manner, we are willing to match Iran's good-faith actions by suspending the implementation of the next round of sanctions currently under consideration by the Congress.” For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Rashi's interpretation of the incomplete spelling of Ephron's name reminds us that rhetoric without action carries little meaning. The world must remember this critical lesson and not allow Iran to evade sanctions with cheap talk. ■

Friendship in Writing

Put please, your hand under my thigh (Genesis 24:2)

שים נא ירך תחת ירכי (בראשית כד:ב)

Before sending his trusted servant Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham asked him to place his hand on his thigh, in the manner in which people took oaths in ancient times. Why did Abraham feel the need to demand a formal oath from a devoted servant the Torah describes as, “the elder of his house, that ruled over all that [Abraham] had” (24:2)? Radak (on 24:2) explains that “This was a strong custom in their days in order to formalize any matter, like a covenant a man makes with his neighbor.”

Abraham and his servant shared a special relationship so they strengthened their connection with a formal oath. While the United States and Israel enjoy an unshakable bond, a formal declaration of law will go a long way towards making this already steadfast relationship even stronger.

Elected representatives from across the government characterize the U.S.-Israel relationship as an “unshakable” bond. Recently, elected representatives in both the House and Senate have sponsored The United States-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2013, which would define the U.S.-Israel relationship as a “major strategic partnership” and lay the foundation for expanded U.S.-Israel cooperation in a wide variety of spheres. These spheres would include defense, intelligence, homeland security, energy, science and trade. The bill expands authority for forward-deployed U.S. weapons stockpiles in Israel, providing important military equipment for either to use in a crisis, encourages the president to transfer essential military equipment to Israel to meet current and projected strategic threats, and also seeks to find ways for Israel to join the Visa Waiver Program—eliminating the requirement for Israelis and Americans to acquire tourist visas to visit either country. This important bill will help the United States maximize the benefits of an already thriving alliance with Israel by formalizing the strong relationship between the two countries and expanding cooperation in a variety of arenas. To contact your members of Congress and encourage them to become a co-sponsor, visit www.aipac.org/TakeAction.

Abraham recognized that even solid relationships benefit from formal acts of commitment. By declaring Israel a “major strategic partner,” the U.S. will make a thriving friendship even stronger. ■