



Sermon Tidbits

OCTOBER 28, 2013

Parashat Toldot

Sowing Seeds of Blessing

And found in that year a hundredfold (Genesis 26:12) (וימצא בשנה ההיא מאה שערים (בראשית כו:יב))

The Torah tells us that Isaac excelled at farming. After he planted a crop, he “found in the same year a hundredfold; and the Lord blessed him” (26:12). Rashi explains that the verse means that his crop yielded a hundred times the expected yield, due to divine blessing. Yet, the Midrash (Pirkei D’rabbi Eliezer Chapter 32) offers a different, homiletic interpretation of this verse. The Midrash teaches us that Isaac, a shepherd, wouldn’t plant crops. Therefore the verse is an allegory that teaches us instead of actual planting, “he tithed his money and ‘planted’ charity for the poor...and every tithe that he gave produced a hundred-fold in blessings.”

According to the Midrash, through his charity Isaac planted seeds of blessing. Despite the current challenges, Israeli organizations remain committed to similarly planting their seeds of blessing for the refugees of the Syrian Civil War.

Israel faces challenges unlike most countries in the world. Amid the constant threat of regional neighbors seeking its destruction, and despite the challenges presented along each of its borders, the Jewish state remains steadfast in its commitment to bettering the world and preserving life. After more than three years of civil war in Syria, which has killed over 100,000 and displaced millions, tens of thousands of Syrian civilians have streamed into Jordanian refugee camps seeking shelter and safety. There, IsraAid, an Israeli humanitarian aid agency, is helping to provide and distribute care packages of basic necessities like cooking oil, cleaning supplies, lentils, rice, sugar and other dry goods, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. IsraAid works through local non-governmental organizations (NGO) in Jordan, channeling funds from Israel to organizations which then purchase and distribute the supply packages. “People are hungry and it doesn’t matter. They are not asking where the aid comes from,” An NGO director said. Alon, an Israeli volunteer explained that “We don’t come with big Israeli flags or any political affiliation. We’re not looking at this to see if it is good for the Syrian-Israel relationship. We are looking only at the people we are going to work with.” The tireless work of IsraAID across Israel’s border ensures that even the citizens of nations whose governments oppose Israel’s existence can get vital assistance. For more on how Israel helps others, click [here](#).

Isaac sowed seeds of blessing by offering help to those in need. Today, Israelis are sowing seeds of peace and blessing by helping their neighbors who live under dictators that deprive their citizens of the most basic, inalienable rights. ■

Combining Strength and Peace

The voice is the voice of Jacob... (Genesis 27:22)

הקול קול יעקב (בראשית כז:כב)

In the famous story of the theft of Esau’s blessing, Jacob covered his arms with goat skins to mimic Esau’s hairy arms. When Isaac sensed something amiss, he drew Jacob close to feel his arms and famously exclaims, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau” (27:22). Many commentators explain that these two attributes conflict, as the peaceful voice of Jacob cannot coexist with the violent hands of Esau. Yet, Rabbi Uri Sherki suggests that rather than contradict, the two attributes in fact complement one-another. With hands of Esau one can project power and strength. Once backed by that power, he can then utilize the voice of Jacob to ensure the peace.

Isaac recognized that strength and peace, when combined, have the potential to avert conflict. If the world hopes to end Iran's dangerous nuclear weapons program, we must welcome talks with the leaders of the Islamic Republic while at the same time providing a credible threat of military action.

President Theodore Roosevelt described his foreign policy succinctly: "Speak softly, and carry a big stick." On numerous occasions, Roosevelt combined peaceful negotiations with the backing of military might. Today, as the U.S. joins the international community for talks with Iran, it too must combine the two elements of peace and strength. America cannot ignore the opportunity to halt Iran's illicit nuclear program through peaceful negotiation, and we must welcome the opportunity for renewed talks with the new Iranian leadership. At the same time, the U.S. must back its soft talk with strength. Rather than easing sanctions, America must continue to ratchet up the pressure on Iran's crumbling economy, and send the clear message that rhetoric will not suffice. Moreover, Congress and the Obama administration must continue to send a strong message that all options are on the table, and that the United States is prepared to use all instruments of American power to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon capability. Only when faced with a credible threat of military action has Iran previously agreed to suspend its nuclear program. We've seen this happen: In 2003, faced with U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran suspended its uranium enrichment program, fearing military action against its nuclear infrastructure. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Rabbi Uri Sherki suggests that when combined, the elements of strength and peace complement one-another. The international community must combine these two critical elements to curtail Iran's nuclear weapons program. ■

Abandoning Hatred

Esau hated Jacob (Genesis 27:41)

וַיִּשְׂטֵם עֵשָׂו אֶת יַעֲקֹב (בראשית כז:מא)

After Jacob stole Esau's blessing we read that "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart: 'Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob'" (27:41). Yet, 20 years later, Esau kissed his brother during their fateful reunion (see 33:4). While Rashi writes that Esau only forgave Jacob temporarily, according to the Midrash Esau had a change of heart. "Said Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar: [Esau's] compassion was aroused at that moment, and [Esau] kissed [Jacob] with all his heart" (Bereishit Rabbah 78).

Esau abandoned his hatred for Jacob and the two brothers reconciled. A meaningful peace agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians can only be possible if, like Esau, the Palestinians can abandon their hatred for Israel.

In his recent [speech](#) to the United Nations Security Council, Israeli Permanent Representative to the U.N Ron Prosor noted that Israel desires peace and is committed to serious and meaningful negotiations. The Israelis envision the day when they can live free from divisions, hatred, and violence. He pointed out that, "On the very same day that CNN beamed images of Abbas talking about peace at the U.N...the P.A. and Fatah held ceremonies to honor terrorists responsible for the murder and maiming of innocent Israelis...a Fatah official read a speech on behalf of Abbas praising terrorist Abu Sukkar who killed 15 Israelis and wounded more than 60. This murderer was described as: 'the most noble among the noble.' At another event on the same day, a member of Abbas's Fatah's Central Committee glorified terrorist Dalal Mughrabi, who hijacked a bus and killed 37 civilians, 12 of whom were children. This attack was described as 'the glorious deeds of [a] hero.'" In a recent op-ed piece published in [The New York Times](#), Yuval Steinitz, Israel's Minister of Intelligence and International Affairs wrote that the next generation of Palestinians is being schooled in a culture of hatred that idolizes terrorists, demonizes Jews, and promotes the conviction that sooner or later Israel should cease to exist. This hatred, more than anything else, represents the greatest obstacle to achieving a meaningful peace agreement between the two parties. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

When Esau removed the hatred in his heart for Jacob, reconciliation and peace quickly followed. If Palestinian leaders truly desire peace, they must emulate Esau's example and halt their encouragement and sponsorship of hatred. ■

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