

OCTOBER 15, 2013

Parashat Vayera

The Point of No Return

Whether they have done altogether... (Genesis 18:21)

עשו כלה... (בראשית יח:כא)

The Torah describes the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah as “exceedingly grievous” (18:20). Yet, before decreeing the destruction of the two cities, God first descended to revisit them and determine whether, “they have done altogether according to the cry of it” (18:21). What is the meaning of this strange verse? Shmuel David Luzzato (Shadal) explains (see his commentary to the Torah on 18:21) that God wished to determine whether the cities’ wicked behavior was “done completely,” and could not be reversed. If the cities’ wickedness could be undone, then the cities would be spared. But if their evil acts had brought them past the point of no return, they could not be saved.

Sodom and Gomorrah were doomed once their wickedness reached an irreversible level. If negotiations to peacefully end Iran’s nuclear weapons program are not to be similarly doomed, Iran must suspend its nuclear weapons enrichment activity before its weapons program reaches an irreversible level.

In his recent speech to the United Nations, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani made clear that Tehran would not halt its enrichment program and that international “acceptance of and respect for the implementation of the right to enrichment” constitutes a key Iranian objective. In fact, Rouhani himself [suggested](#) that the talks represent a stalling tactic aimed at giving Iran sufficient time to complete its nuclear development. To provide the necessary time and space for discussions, Tehran must rebut this suspicion by suspending all enrichment and reprocessing activity immediately. Iran’s nuclear activities have brought it so close to a nuclear weapons capability that time for successful negotiations will run out if the regime continues on its present course. To avoid any misunderstanding in Tehran, America must clearly signal that it will consider no easing of sanctions until Iran has verifiably suspended its nuclear program. If Iran’s nuclear activities continue, the United States and the international community should escalate sanctions and reinforce President Obama’s message that a credible military option is on the table to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

In Abraham’s time, the cities could not be saved because their wickedness had passed the point of no return. The U.S must ensure that as it seeks a peaceful solution with Iran, the Islamic Republic does not pass the point of no return and become a nuclear power. ■

A Lasting Partnership

...with me, nor with my son, nor with my son’s son (Genesis 21:23)

לי ולניני ולנכדי (בראשית כא:כג)

In his petition to establish a covenant with Abraham, the Philistine King Abimelech asked Abraham to swear that “you will not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son’s son” (21:23). In essence, Abimelech requested that the covenant remain binding long into the future, to which Abraham agreed. The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 54) notes that the agreement indeed lasted many years. When the Nation of Israel left Egypt, we read that they traveled in a roundabout way through the Sinai and “not by the way of the land of the Philistines” (Exodus 13:17). Why wouldn’t the Israelites take the direct route through the Philistines’ land? The Midrash explains that Abimelech’s grandson was still alive, and the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech remained, even hundreds of years later.

Abraham and Abimelech established a covenant that benefited not only themselves, but generations of their descendants as well. In this same vein, the military cooperation between Israel and the United States that began decades ago continues to grow to the benefit of both countries.

October 14 marked 40 years since the United States implemented [Operation Nickel Grass](#) when the Military Airlift Command of the U.S. Air Force shipped 22,325 tons of tanks, artillery, ammunition, and supplies to support Israel's fight against invading Syrian and Egyptian armies. These shipments, which demonstrated America's burgeoning commitment to Israel's security, also represented a shift in Israel away from utilizing French military equipment towards the American military hardware that today represents a critical, core element of Israel's military infrastructure. Since that time, the militaries of the United States and Israel have developed a full-fledged, two-way partnership. These two militaries share information, training, military capability and equipment. In addition, joint efforts have produced weapons and defense systems like the Iron Dome and Arrow, which protect Israeli civilians now, and could very well protect Americans from rocket attacks in the future. Today, a centerpiece of the interaction between the two militaries has been combined missile defense training, including the biannual Juniper Cobra exercise, during which U.S. and Israeli forces practice cooperative tactics to counter the growing threat from ballistic missiles and long-range rockets. For more on the U.S.-Israel military partnership, click [here](#).

While Israeli and American military cooperation is still only several decades old, we must work to ensure that the relationship between the two countries continues to grow and prosper just like Abraham and Abimelech, whose partnership lasted for generations. ■

Clearing the Air

And Abraham rebuked Abimelech (Genesis 21:25)

והוכיח אברהם את אבימלך (בראשית כא:כה)

After Abimelech sued Abraham for peace, hoping to establish a treaty, why did Abraham rebuke the Phillistine king about the wells that his servants had stolen? According to Yalkut Me'am Loez (on 12:24-25), Abraham could not ignore the theft and make peace. He writes, "Know that if two people engage in an argument and wish to make peace between them, it is necessary that they both fundamentally clarify the matters between them in order to purify their hearts. For if each one does not unburden his heart from the complaints against his neighbor, even though you see them hugging and kissing, this peace cannot last, and with every complaint the hatred will return to its original place."

Abraham's rebuke of Abimelech exposed the truth, allowing peace to reign between them. As Israel and the Palestinians also work towards a lasting peace, they too will need to honestly address the issues that stand in the way.

In a recent speech at Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [said](#) that there cannot be peace with the Palestinians until they recognize the Jewish right to a homeland. "A necessary condition to getting a true solution [to the Israeli-Palestinian] conflict was and remains clear as the sun: ending the refusal to recognize the right of the Jews to a homeland of their own in the land of their fathers," he said. In his [talk](#) Netanyahu said, "When [the Palestinians] are asked to say: Well...are you ready finally to recognize the Jewish state...And the answer so far has been no...As long as you refuse to do so, there will never be peace...I mention this because the political process with the Palestinians involves resolving complicated problems. It will be deemed successful only if it is built on the foundations of truth, the truth of the present and historic truth and unfortunately, the truth that is under constant attack from our enemies and opponents." In a recent meeting with Netanyahu and Israeli President Shimon Peres, Czech President Milos Zeman, noting the similar experiences of the Czech Republic and the Jewish people [said](#), "I completely understand the need for an independent Jewish and democratic state." Only when the Palestinian leadership makes a similar declaration can true peace be possible. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Abraham rebuked Abimelech so that the peace between them could be solid and long-lasting. Today, Israel and the Palestinians must reach a similar true, lasting peace based on mutual trust and understanding. ■