



Sermon Tidbits

NOVEMBER 18, 2013

Parashat Vayeishev

No Peace

And Jacob dwelled (Genesis 37:1)

וישב יעקב (בראשית לז:א)

Rashi (on 37:2) notes that “Jacob wished to dwell in tranquility—and immediately the ‘trouble’ of Joseph overwhelmed him.” Commenting on Rashi’s prophetic words, Rabbi Menachem Rabb explained that Jacob’s experience foreshadowed his descendants’ future as well. “Almost never in history did the Jews live [in the Land of Israel] peacefully...History repeats itself. Our time is no different.” The Sages note (Berachot 5a) that the land of Israel was given through suffering.

Jacob wished to dwell in peace and tranquility, but was instead plagued by suffering which prevented him from doing so. Today, history repeats itself as Israelis continue to suffer from unwarranted, unjustified attacks.

Recently, an Israeli soldier, Eden Atias of Nazareth Illit, was stabbed to death while sleeping on a bus by Hussein Jawadra, who, according to [The New York Times](#), “told security personnel under questioning that he had acted to avenge one or more relatives serving time in Israeli prison.” The attack represents the most recent in a series of violent episodes in recent months. Since September, an Israeli soldier was killed in Hebron, apparently by a Palestinian sniper; an off-duty soldier was killed by a Palestinian acquaintance who had lured him to the West Bank; and a retired colonel was bludgeoned to death outside his home in the Jordan Valley. Israeli politicians castigated the ongoing campaign of incitement to violence pervasive in Palestinian culture. In response to the attack, [The Guardian](#) reported, “ Hamas congratulated the attacker. ‘This is a heroic act of resistance showing that all methods of oppression and terror have not and will not succeed in stopping our people from carrying out jihad and resistance,’ Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum wrote on Facebook.”

From Jacob’s time to today, Israel continues to find itself subject to attack. Despite their desire to live in peace with their neighbors, Israelis just like Jacob cannot dwell in tranquility. ■

Sharing Blessings

And he sent him from the valley of Hebron (Genesis 37:14)

וישלחהו מעמק חברון (בראשית לז:יד)

While Joseph’s brothers later blamed themselves for selling him into slavery, he surprisingly took a far more positive view telling them “It was to save life God sent me ahead of you...to ensure your survival on earth” (45:5-7). Nechama Leibowitz (see *Studies on the Book of Genesis* pp. 495-499) writes that the text itself alludes to the divine nature of Joseph’s sojourn to Egypt. Describing the fact that Jacob sent him “from the valley of Hebron” (37:14). Rashi (on 37:14) notes that this alludes to “the deep counsel of the righteous man (Abraham) buried in Hebron”—who was informed that his descendants would one day dwell in Egypt. Writes Leibowitz, “Fortunate is he to whom it is granted to detect in the metamorphoses of his daily existence...a mission on which he has been sent by God.”

Joseph recognized the divine hand which allowed him to perform a great service on behalf of mankind. Today, Israel follows in Joseph’s footsteps and uses its blessings and knowledge to bring benefit to people around the world.

Whenever tragedy strikes, Israel stands ready to offer help, knowledge and assistance. Following the recent devastating typhoon in the Philippines, Israel [deployed](#) an advanced IDF multi-department medical facility to the city of Tacloban to provide medical care for disaster casualties. The Israeli aid relief organization IsraAID headed to remote areas of the typhoon-struck country to provide medical and humanitarian aid to those affected by the storm. The organization also said it was now registered with the U.N. Coordination Office which is coordinating all humanitarian agencies in the country and seeking to set up “protection centers for children and women while camps are starting to be built.” [NBC’s Today Show](#) showcased Israel’s efforts in the Philippines including the birth of baby Israel, the first birth in the IDF field hospital. This recent action represents one of many Israeli efforts to help victims of natural disasters. Israel has contributed to relief efforts after earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters. For example, Israel sent medicine, water, food and other supplies to Sri Lanka after the tsunami in 2004. Israel also sent humanitarian aid and equipment to New Orleans and the Eastern Seaboard for victims of Hurricanes Katrina and [Sandy](#), respectively. After the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Israel sent a comprehensive hospital team that set the standard for treating victims of a natural disaster in a speedy and humane manner. Israel also sent a medical team and 18 tons of essential supplies in the aftermath of the 2011 Japan earthquake, and a total of 50 mobile structures and 80 housing structures to aid victims of the 2011 Turkey earthquake. For more on Israel around the world, click [here](#).

Just as Joseph saw the blessing in his opportunity to help others escape the ravages of famine, Israel uses its knowledge, expertise and wealth to help people around the world cope with devastation and suffering. ■

A Historic Mistake

And they sold Joseph (Genesis 37:28)

וימכרו את יוסף (בראשית לז:כח)

One of the more troubling prayers recited on Yom Kippur is the poetic lamentation describing the Ten Martyrs executed by the Roman hegemony in ancient times. The prayer directly connects the martyrs to the sale of Joseph, as the Roman despot decrees that the ten sages must be executed as punishment for their ten “ancestors, who sold their brother to a caravan of Ishmaelites...Were they alive I would have prosecuted them...so you must bear the sin of your ancestors” (Yom Kippur Mussaf). This prayer also reflects the message of the Midrash (Mishlei) which states that, “The Ten Martyrs were killed for the sin of the sale of Joseph.” The Sages viewed the sale of Joseph at the hands of his brothers as so calamitous, that the Jewish people felt the repercussions of that act many centuries later.

Joseph’s brothers made a historic mistake that changed the course of Jewish history. As Iran presses ahead with its nuclear weapons program, America and Israel must continue to work together to avoid making a similarly egregious error that may cause untold damage in the future.

Ongoing diplomatic talks between Iran and the permanent five members of the U.N. Security Council and Germany are reportedly nearing [an interim agreement](#) over Tehran’s illicit nuclear program. The deal would seek to open a window for a more comprehensive deal and would involve capping some of Iran’s nuclear activities in exchange for relief from some of the crushing economic sanctions that brought Iran to the negotiating table. While talks may lead to an historic breakthrough, we must also be mindful that the Islamic Republic has a history of convincing the West of its sincerity in talks only to reverse course and continue its nuclear pursuit—a strategy employed by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani when he was Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator. The calamitous impact of not resolving the Iranian nuclear challenge and preventing the regime from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability would have repercussions around the world. America’s national security, economic interest and allies would be under a new threat. For the Jewish state, a nuclear capable Iran poses an existential danger as the regime has consistently called for Israel’s removal and would have weapon to achieve that objective. Iran’s backing of Hezbollah, which has 100,000 rockets pointed at Israeli citizens, would only be enhanced as the terror army would operate within Iran’s nuclear umbrella. For more on Iran, click [here](#).

Joseph’s brother made a historic mistake for which their descendants paid dearly many years later. We must speak out to ensure that the world avoids a mistake that could have consequences for the U.S. and its allies for years to come. ■