

NOVEMBER 4, 2013

Parashat Vayitzei

A Place of Protection

Laban the Aramite (Genesis 31:20)

הארמי לבן (בראשית כ:לא)

Jacob complained about Laban's deceit and theft, but Laban himself had an entirely different design. According to the Sages, Laban intended to exterminate the entire family. How do they know this? In Deuteronomy, when we bring the first-fruits offering in the Temple, we begin the accompanying text by declaring "An Aramite tried to destroy my father" (Deuteronomy 26:5). The Passover Haggadah interprets this verse to mean that Laban was worse than the wicked Pharaoh of Egypt, "Laban sought to uproot [the entire nation], whereas Pharaoh only decreed death upon the male children [and not the females]" (Passover Haggadah). Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Neria writes that Laban did indeed truly intend to exterminate the entire family—including women and children. "[Laban] did not simply intend to take advantage and steal [from Jacob]. Rather, he intended to uproot everything...a final solution."

From the earliest moments in our history, we have confronted powerful forces aimed at our destruction. Thankfully, the state of Israel stands ready today to protect and defend Jews around the world.

Shabbat Vayitzei marks 75 years since the Nazis in Germany erupted into anti-Jewish pogroms where they torched synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools and businesses. This incident from November 9 to November 10, 1938, is forever known as *Kristallnacht* or the Night of Broken Glass. Prior to *Kristallnacht*, German Jews had been subjected to repressive policies but after *Kristallnacht* the Nazis implemented their "Final Solution" carrying out the murder of 6 million Jews. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, many of the survivors found shelter in displaced persons (DP) camps administered by the Allied powers. Between 1948 and 1951, almost 700,000 Jews immigrated to Israel, including 136,000 Jewish displaced persons from Europe. Since that time the state of Israel has worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of the Jewish people. Whether absorbing hundreds of thousands of [Jewish refugees from Arab countries](#) who were expelled in the 1940s and 1950s, working to liberate and support [Ethiopian](#) and [Soviet](#) Jewry or rescuing [Jewish prisoners in Uganda](#), Israel is working to make sure that Jews never again suffer the fate that our brothers and sisters experienced 75 years ago in Germany. As then-Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin asserted in 1983, "anti-Semitism and its consequences are no longer an internal affair (of other countries) as far as we are concerned, and we assert the right to intervene to protect Jews wherever they are."

The sages reveal Laban's true plan of exterminating Jacob's entire family, reminding us of the many people throughout our history who have tried to exterminate the Jews. As we sadly commemorate the 75th anniversary of *Kristallnacht* we should all take a moment and marvel that today we have a state of Israel so that there is always someone there to ensure the security of the Jewish people. ■

Unfair Treatment

And Laban gathered together (Genesis 29:22)

ויאסף לבן (בראשית כט:כב)

At Jacob's wedding to Rachel, Laban famously switched Rachel for Leah. The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 70), explains that Laban shared his plans to trick Jacob with the local residents to guarantee that no one would reveal the switch to the unsuspecting groom. Dr. Samuel Faust of Bar Ilan University writes that Laban used the power of the

crowd to take advantage of the powerless Jacob. He specifically “drafted his neighbors in order to justify his actions as ‘local custom’ and to place the responsibility for his actions on their shoulders.”

Laban used his community to unfairly gang up on and take advantage of Jacob. Nowadays, like Laban, through the Human Rights Council, the United Nations has similarly ganged up on the Jewish state in an unfair, unjust manner.

For the past two years, Israel has boycotted participation in the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. While Israel proudly stands behind its strong record of protecting human rights, it refused to participate in the U.N. Human Rights Council because the entire council, by charter, is biased against the Jewish state. According to [Haaretz](#), “Article 7, or the council’s charter...stipulates that any conference on human rights would hold a separate discussion of human rights in Israel and the West Bank. Israel is the only nation subject to such a stipulation.” In addition, Israel is the only country that is “not a member of any of the regional groups within the human rights council, a fact that makes it difficult for Israel to garner support for various diplomatic endeavors.” Recently, the United States and other nations have pressured Israel to return to the Human Rights Council and submit to a Universal Periodic Review. [Israel acquiesced to the request](#), but only after extracting commitments to “limit” the use of Article 7, as well as an agreement to hold a vote on full membership in a regional group on the council. For too long, the United Nations has used the Human Rights Council as a tool to gang up against and unfairly single out the Jewish state. The United States must insist that the U.N. end this blatant bias once and for all, and treat Israel in a fair, equal manner. For more on Israel and the United Nations, click [here](#).

Like Laban, who enlisted the help of his neighbors to unfairly cheat Jacob, the United Nations has used the guise of human rights to unfairly gang up against the Jewish state. ■

Refusing to Concede

All that you see is mine (Genesis 31:43)

כל אשר אתה ראה לי הוא (בראשית לא:מג)

After enduring the embarrassment of having his tents searched by Laban, Jacob finally responded to Laban’s provocations. Jacob insisted that despite the numerous sacrifices he had made over the years, Laban refused to remunerate him for his toil, cheating him time and time again. Laban refused to concede even this small point to Jacob insisting, “The children are my children...and everything that you see is mine...” S’forno (on 31:43) explains that Laban truly believed that all of Jacob’s possessions rightfully belonged to him. So, he told Jacob, “If I sent you away empty-handed or switched your salary, I was not in fact taking anything of yours, for it all belongs to me.”

Despite Jacob’s numerous sacrifices, Laban refused to make even a single concession. Today, Israel finds itself in a similar predicament as the Palestinian Authority ignores Israel’s difficult gestures while refusing to make concessions.

As the second phase of the goodwill gesture assured to the Palestinian Authority before the resumption of peace talks in August, the Israeli government, with strong reservations, recently released 26 Palestinians convicted of terrorist acts. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [called](#) the prisoner release “one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make.” Yet, while Israel takes painful measures, the Palestinians refuse to act in kind. Instead of acknowledging Israel’s sacrifice, P.A. President Abbas lauded the murderers as “[freedom fighters](#)” and openly declared that there would not be a peace treaty with Israel until all Palestinian prisoners are freed. More troubling though is Palestinian intransigence in the talks themselves. According to [The Times of Israel](#), a disgruntled P.A. official leaked to the press the fact that the P.A. “demands that any land swap with Israel as part of a peace deal not exceed 1.9 percent of the West Bank, less than half of the land necessary to incorporate the lion’s share of settlers.” In addition, they also insist, “that all Palestinian refugees and their descendants be granted the right to choose to live in Israel or the Palestinian territories as part of a final agreement.” For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Like Laban, who refused to acknowledge Jacob’s toil and suffering, the Palestinian Authority refuses to acknowledge the painful steps Israel has taken for peace, instead making additional, unreasonable demands. ■

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.