

NOVEMBER 11, 2013

Parashat Vayishlach

Core Principles

I dwelled with Laban (Genesis 32:5)

עם לבן גרתי (בראשית לב:ה)

Rashi (on 32:5) notes that the *gematria* of the word *garti* is 613—the number of commandments in the Torah. Thus, Jacob was subtly conveying to Esau that despite spending over 20 years in the presence of Laban, he remained dedicated to the values of the Torah. Rabbi Yitzchak Yehuda Shmelkis wonders (on 32:5) why Jacob would bother conveying this information to his brother. Why should Esau care about Jacob's religiosity? He explains that because Jacob reached out to Esau in peace, "[Jacob] informed him that first and foremost, let it not enter [Esau's] spirit that for the sake of peace he would abandon even a small aspect of his essence...in order to find favor in his eyes."

Jacob conveyed to his brother that despite his desire to reach a peaceful accord with Esau, he could not compromise his core values in the process. The United States similarly cannot compromise its core principles as it continues its efforts reach a peaceful accord with Iran.

Since the United States began its negotiations with the Islamic Republic over Iran's nuclear weapons program, the U.S. set clear demands including that Iran comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions that demand it suspend all enrichment and heavy water activity, immediately stop the installation of additional centrifuges, cease production of 20 percent enriched uranium, cease development of the heavy water reactor under construction in Arak, and allow international inspectors to access the Parchin military facility. Moreover, only the threat of additional, crushing sanctions would compel Iran to return to the negotiating table and follow through on its commitments. Recently, administration officials have lobbied congressional leaders not to proceed with pending additional sanctions legislation during the next two rounds of negotiations with Iran. Yet, congressional leaders see things differently. In a letter to President Obama, Senators Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Mark Kirk (R-IL) and John McCain (R-AZ) with a bipartisan group of their peers "told the president that they would only halt progress on the bill if Iran agreed to a complete freeze of uranium enrichment." For more on Iran, click [here](#).

Just as Jacob would not compromise on his core principles to achieve peace with Esau, America must also make clear that it will not compromise its principles and continue to pressure Iran with tougher sanctions until its dangerous nuclear program is dismantled. ■

Dehumanization

And I have oxen... (Genesis 32:5)

ויהי לי שור... (בראשית לב:ה)

Jacob told Esau "I have oxen, and asses and flocks, and men-servants and maid-servants..." (32:5-6) Why does Jacob share this information? Rabbi Shalom Meir Valk (see Ma'ayan Hashavua Vol. 1 p. 469) explains that Jacob realized that hatred often stems from dehumanization, as one transforms a human being into a caricature which he can deride and hate. But when he truly learns about the individual, "He says to himself: One moment! He is a human being like me! It's a jarring revelation: He doesn't have horns! Rather, his life is entirely normal." By focusing on the mundane, and emphasizing his own humanity, Jacob was able to dissipate his brother's hatred.

By shattering the false caricature that Esau had drawn, Jacob humanized himself and dissipated his brother's hatred. Today, ongoing dehumanization of Jacob's descendants fans the flames of hatred for Israel.

Israeli leaders have long complained about ongoing Palestinian incitement against Israel and a systematic dehumanization of Israelis and Jews within the Palestinian territories. According to [The Algemeiner](#), Palestinians have described Zionists as “‘barbaric moneys or ‘fork-tailed devils,’ glorification of terrorists (and even Hitler), and denial of Jewish history.” These efforts, when internalized by the Palestinian population—particularly children—make it difficult for peace to take root. [The New York Times](#) chronicled disturbing new Hamas-issued textbooks, which deny not only Israel's right to exist, but its very existence. “What Gaza teenagers are reading in their 50-page hardcover texts this fall includes references to the Jewish Torah and Talmud as ‘fabricated,’ and a description of Zionism as a racist movement whose goals include driving Arabs out of all of the area between the Nile in Africa and the Euphrates in Iraq, Syria and Turkey. ‘Palestine,’ in turn, is defined as a state for Muslims stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. A list of Palestinian cities include Haifa, Beersheba and Acre—all cities within Israel's 1948 borders. And the books rebut Jewish historical claims to the territory by saying, ‘The Jews and the Zionist movement are not related to Israel, because the sons of Israel are a nation which had been annihilated.’” As peace talks with the Palestinians continue, the international community must decry these continuing efforts to dehumanize Israelis and delegitimize Israel. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Jacob realized that Esau would continue to hate him as long as he refused to relate to him as a human being, having human hopes, dreams and aspirations. Jacob's lesson remains especially relevant in the modern Middle East. ■

A Mortal Threat

And he divided the people that was with him (Genesis 32:8) (וַיַּחֲזֵק אֶת הָעַם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ (בְּרֵאשִׁית ל"ב:ח))

Twice in Parashat Vayishlach, Jacob attempted to minimize the devastating damage his family would suffer following a military attack. In great fear Jacob split his camp in two saying, “If Esau come to the one camp, and smite it, then the camp which is left shall escape” (32:9). Later, before the actual meeting, Jacob divided his children, placing them with their respective mothers. Why does he do this? Radak (on 31:1) explains that he felt each mother would most strenuously protect her children, and if she could not “She would cry and beg for their [salvation].”

Just as Jacob faced the very real threat of annihilation and devastation, Israel continues to face the threat of attack from adversaries bent on its destruction.

Before the international community coerced Syria to dismantle its chemical arsenal, tens of thousands of Israelis rushed to distribution centers to pick up their government-allotted gas masks. Yet, the ever-present possibility that Assad's chemical weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists bent on harming Israel represents just one of the threats to Israel's safety and security. Israel faces a serious and growing challenge from terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah and their state sponsors, which espouse the destruction of Israel and carry out terrorist attacks on the Jewish state. In addition, Israel faces an extraordinary challenge in defending its citizens against expanding missile threats. Iran, Arab states and the terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah are stockpiling tens of thousands of missiles and rockets to attack the Jewish state. The spreading pursuit of nuclear programs by Mideast states could pose an existential threat to Israel, while harming other important American interests and devastating the international non-proliferation regime. Finally, turmoil in the Arab world has brought a new level of instability to the Middle East. With a new regime in Egypt, chaos in Syria, Hezbollah dominating in Lebanon, and uncertainty in Jordan, Israel must tackle new threats while thwarting ongoing Palestinian terrorism and a looming nuclear Iran.

Jacob's efforts to address the very real threats to his family's safety highlight the very real threats that Israel must address and defend against each and every day. ■