



# Sermon Tidbits

NOVEMBER 17, 2014

## Parashat Toldot

### Critical Continuity

**And these are the generations of Isaac (Genesis 25:19)**

**ואלה תולדות יצחק (בראשית כה:יט)**

Strangely, the first verse of this week's parashat seems to repeat an obvious piece of information: "And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham fathered Isaac." (25:19) Surely, if Isaac was Abraham's son, of course Abraham fathered Isaac. Abarbanel explains that the repetitive language emphasizes the similarities between the lives of both forefathers. Many of Isaac's experiences described in chapter 26—the famine, the abduction of his wife, the treaty with Abimelech—echo events in Abraham's life. By revisiting and reliving many of Abraham's experiences, Isaac established unity critical to solidifying Abraham's spiritual legacy for future generations.

Isaac worked to establish the continuity critical to Abraham's spiritual legacy. With the recent election of a new Congress, we must now make a similar effort to ensure that the strong support for Israel continues in the coming years.

In Washington, D.C., battles never stay won. Each new vote that affects Israel, each new piece of legislation relating to Israel that Congress approves, requires pro-Israel activists to reach out to members of Congress and explain the significance. The 114th Congress kicks off this January populated by junior lawmakers in both chambers, over three in five lawmakers in the U.S. House, 61%, have served for less than three terms. The U.S. Senate has seen a 58% turnover rate since 2008. This high turnover rate presents a huge educational challenge for the pro-Israel community, for many of the members of Congress with whom we worked hard to establish strong relationships won't be the decision makers next year. Additionally, most of this year's freshmen will enter Congress with little or no background in either foreign affairs or a deep understanding of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Increased pro-Israel activism thus is essential in the process of educating new members of Congress. Now, more than ever, it is critical that we involve ourselves in the political process, and make the effort to ensure that our newly elected representatives understand and appreciate the importance of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

Isaac has dedicated his life to creating the continuity critical to Abraham's legacy. Today, with such high turnover rates in Congress, only our hard work will create the continuity critical to maintaining America's strong bond with Israel. ■

### Steadfast Determination

**And he dug another well (Genesis 26:22)**

**ויחפר באר אחרת (בראשית כו:כב)**

When she was stabbed to death last week by a Palestinian terrorist, twenty-five-year-old Dalia Lemkus was standing at the same junction where she had been stabbed and lightly wounded as a teenager seven years beforehand. At her funeral, her sister [noted](#) that she never allowed the trauma of that event to stop her from traveling along her normal route to work. "At the time, I asked how you could continue hitchhiking and standing at the same junction where you were stabbed and to do so with such inner strength," Michal recalled. "Your answer empowered me. You said, 'Do you think I would let them defeat me?'"

Isaac demonstrates a similar steely resolve, especially in the face of difficult setbacks. Parashat Toldot chronicles Isaac's extensive struggle to dig wells for water critical to his family's survival. Time after time, the local population destroys each well, forcing Isaac to relocate. (See Genesis 26:15-22) Finally, the Philistines stop harassing Isaac, and do not destroy the wells in Rehovot. (Verse 22) Commenting on this section, the Rabbinat of the IDF [notes](#) that the actions of Isaac and his shepherds carry a powerful lesson. "The shepherds of Isaac could have lost patience of abandoned hope from digging more wells when they knew that they will be taken by the Philistines. Yet, the knowledge that their mission was just, infused them the responsibility to continue their mission to acquire the water necessary for their survival in the Land of Israel. Their uncompromising stance forced the Philistines to understand that ongoing harassment would fail to bear fruit, and in the end they completely halted their malicious activities."

On the same day of Lemkus' murder, twenty-year-old Israeli Air Force soldier Almog Shiloni was also stabbed to death by a terrorist at the entrance to a Tel Aviv train station. Commenting on Shilon's murder, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [said](#), "The terrorism against us knows no borders. It is aimed at all parts of the country for a simple reason. The terrorists and those who incite to it want to get rid of us wherever we are. As far as they're concerned, we don't need to be in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem or anywhere else. I'll promise you one thing: They won't succeed."

Israel was founded by people who demonstrated steadfast determination to build a state for the Jewish people in their eternal homeland. But it continues to thrive and grow today because of people like Dalia Lemkus, who followed in the footsteps of Isaac, who refused to cower before those who wished to drive him and his family away. Dalia's strength serves as an inspiration for us all to keep working to protect and defend the Jewish state. ■

## Speaking Hatred from the Heart

**And Esau said in his heart (Genesis 27:41)**

**וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו בְּלִבּוֹ (בְּרֵאשִׁית כ״א)**

How does the Torah know that Esau, due to his hatred for Jacob, planned in his heart to kill his brother? Ibn Ezra (on verse 41) offers two suggestions: either he told a confidant, or, even if he didn't, the verse represents prophetic insight into his thoughts. Ramban differs, suggesting that Esau made his plans to kill Jacob known to all. Yet, the Torah describes him as speaking "in his heart" because that decision matched his true inner feelings of hatred for Jacob. Ramban writes, "any decision which a person reaches after deliberation is referred to in Hebrew as 'speaking with the heart' ...when the great hatred of Jacob permeated Esau's soul...he conceived the idea of murdering his brother..."

Esau's declaration of his intention to murder Jacob matched the inner hatred he felt for his brother in his heart. Recently, Iran's supreme leader made a statement that offered a clear view of his inner feelings.

Last week, Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei posted a plan to his Twitter account titled "[9 key questions about the elimination of Israel](#)," which used the hashtag #handsoffalqa referring to the Arabic name of the Temple Mount. Khamenei's comments called Israel a "barbaric, wolflike and infanticidal regime" that "has no cure but to be annihilated." In a subsequent phone call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry personally condemned Khamenei's Twitter attacks to annihilate Israel. Asserting that Khamenei's comments were "unacceptable and shocking," Kerry discussed the tweets while updating Netanyahu on a negotiation session with Iran in Oman. Following the tweets, Netanyahu calls upon the P5+1 countries to not rush into a deal with Iran. "There is no moderation in Iran. It is unrepentant, unreformed. It calls for Israel's eradication, it promotes international terrorism, and as the IAEA report just said, it continues to deceive the international community about its nuclear weapons program," said Netanyahu.

As America negotiates with Iran over its nuclear program, it must remember that just as Esau's plan to kill Jacob came from his heart, when Khamenei tweets about annihilating Israel, he too is speaking, "from the heart." ■

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