



# Sermon Tidbits

NOVEMBER 24, 2014

## Parashat Vayitzei

### The Universal City

**How full of awe is this place! (Genesis 28:17)**

**מה נורא המקום הזה (בראשית כח:יז)**

Rashi (on verse 11) notes that while Jacob is sleeping on Mount Moriah—today known as the Temple Mount—he dreams of the ladder to heaven. When he awakens he exclaims, “This is none other than the house of God!” (verse 17). Using this same moniker, Isaiah (56:7) notes that this house was intended for all nations: “I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer...for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” Rabbi Aaron Lichtenstein notes that this universality applies not only to the Temple, but to Jerusalem as well. “Jerusalem is intended to be a castle and religious center, but in a measured sense an international [center] as well.”

Although Jerusalem has been the center of turmoil over recent weeks, clergy members have recently been working to create a sense of harmony between members of the different faiths in hopes of returning peace to the City of Peace.

Following the tragic murders in Jerusalem last week, a group of Christian, Muslim and Jewish clergy gathered in the courtyard of the synagogue where the murders took place to plead for interfaith tolerance. According to the [Times of Israel](#), “Sheikh Muhammad Kiwan, chairman of the Council of Muslim Leaders in Israel, and former MK Rabbi Michael Melchior called on believers of all faiths to work towards quelling violence and promoting peace.” With Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theofilis III of Jerusalem and Latin Patriarch Fuad Twal in attendance, Sheikh Samir Assi, the imam of the Al-Jazaar mosque in the northern Israeli city of Acre, also condemned the Palestinians’ attack on the synagogue. According to Melchior, religious leaders must provide an example to young believers in order to convince them to turn away from extremist views. “We must end this bloodshed,” he said. “But the unanimous condemnation of the attack by religious leaders of all stripes is very uplifting; it shows young individuals that there is another way.”

As we continue to reel from the brutal Jerusalem attacks, we must follow in the footsteps of the courageous Israeli clergy who are building bridges between members of different faiths in Israel, as they hope to begin a process of healing that will reinforce Jerusalem as a city of prayer and healing for members of all faiths. ■

### Experienced Deception

**You shall not give me anything (Genesis 30:31)**

**לא תתן לי מאומה (בראשית ל:לא)**

When Jacob finally asks Laban for remuneration for his years of dedicated service Laban asks, “What shall I give you?” Jacob quickly replies, “You shall not give me anything...” (verse 31) but then proceeds to delineate precisely which sheep he wishes to receive. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (on verse 31) explains that after decades of being cheated by his father-in-law, Jacob chose his words carefully. Jacob refused to call the money Laban was to give him a “gift.” Through his choice of words he told Laban, “You are not going to *give* me anything... You are to *pay* me.”

Having been cheated repeatedly by Laban, Jacob took careful measures to ensure that Laban couldn’t cheat him yet again. The U.S. must take similar measures to ensure that Iran cannot cheat its way around a final nuclear agreement.

Iran has a long history of cheating and lying to the world in an attempt to conceal the true military nature of its nuclear program. [Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Robert Menendez \(D-NJ\) and Sen. Mark Kirk \(R-IL\)](#) issued a statement outlining the various requirements they believe are necessary for the P5+1 nuclear deal with Iran to be effective including, "...that a good deal will dismantle, not just stall, Iran's illicit nuclear program and prevent Iran from ever becoming a threshold nuclear weapons state. This will require stringent limits on nuclear-related research, development and procurement, coming clean on all possible military dimensions (PMD) issues and a robust inspection and verification regime for decades to prevent Iran from breaking-out or covertly sneaking-out. Gradual sanctions relaxation would only occur if Iran strictly complied with all parts of the agreement. If a potential deal does not achieve these goals, we will work with our colleagues in Congress to act decisively, as we have in the past."

Additionally, [House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce and Ranking Member Eliot Engel](#) issued a statement saying, "We believe that any final agreement between the P5+1 and Iran must foreclose any pathway for Iran to develop a nuclear weapons capability. It must include an effective, intrusive, and long-term verification mechanism that would give us ample warning of any attempt by Iran to break out. It must also require Iran to come clean on its past work to develop a bomb." Given Iran's history of cheating, a workable agreement must also give international inspectors timely access to any suspect location, and any agreement constraining Iran's nuclear program must be enforced for decades, not years. Only with the ability to verify Iranian compliance over an extended period of time can the world have confidence that Iran isn't once again trying to cheat its way to a nuclear weapon.

Just as Jacob learned with Laban, experience has taught us that when dealing with cheaters we cannot trust, but must instead verify. We must take the measures needed to ensure Iran cannot deceive the world far into the future. ■

## A Covenant of Protection

**And now come, let us make a covenant (Genesis 31:44)**

**ועתה לכה נכרתה ברית (בראשית לא:מד)**

The first officer on the scene after the horrific synagogue attack in the quiet Jerusalem neighborhood of Har Nof, was Israeli Druze traffic officer Zidan Saif. The terrorists had already killed four Israelis when Saif rushed into the mayhem to confront the terrorists, gunfight ensued and Saif was fatally wounded. Remembered as a joyful father and [beloved member of his community](#), the policeman was eulogized at his funeral by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin who told the Druze community that, "Your beloved Zidan, one of this State's best sons, didn't hesitate and didn't waver. He was among the first to reach the scene of the massacre, among the first to protect the people of Jerusalem." According to [Ha'aretz](#), "Mada Hasbani, head of the Yanuh-Jat local council in the Galilee, who had visited Saif in the hospital on Tuesday afternoon, said that the policeman came from a veteran village family. 'It's a family of values. The boy acted as was expected of him and according to the standards and values that his parents instilled in him.'" Saif joined the traffic police four-and-a-half years ago and recently reached the rank of sergeant-major. He married his wife, Rinal, in summer 2013 and only four months ago did he welcome his first daughter, also named Rinal, into the world.

Before finally returning with his family to Canaan, Jacob enters into an unusual covenant with Laban signified by a heap of stones over a pillar. Laban states, "This heap be witness, and the pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you shall not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, for harm." (31:52) Abrabanel, in his commentary on the Torah, focuses on the final words of Laban's statement, "for harm," to argue that Jacob and Laban enter in an agreement of mutual protection writing, "It seems that they obligated themselves that should wickedness, strife or tribulation come upon one of them, that the other would come to help and save him from it, as is the way of devoted brothers."

Abrabanel's explanation precisely describes the actions of Zidan Saif, and the Druze community he represented with valiance and bravery. A loyal citizen of Israel, and acting like a devoted brother, he ignored the danger to his own life and rushed to protect the lives of his fellow police officers and innocent civilians. In the words of his father, "He gave his life for his country." ■

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