



# Sermon Tidbits

DECEMBER 1, 2014

## Parashat Vayishlach

### Different Attitudes

**We came to your brother, to Esau (Genesis 32:7)**

**באנו אל אחיך אל עשו (בראשית לב:ז)**

In the Hebrew text, the messengers distinguish between the words “your brother” and “Esau.” Why the separation between the two, which implies that they are different from each other? Why did the messengers not simply say, “We came to your brother Esau?” Rashi (on verse 7) explains that by separating between the two phrases, the messengers conveyed to Jacob a critical message about Esau’s attitude towards Jacob. “You said ‘he is my brother,’ but he relates to you as Esau the wicked—he continues to maintain his hatred [for you].” While Jacob related to Esau in friendship, Esau dealt with Jacob as an adversary.

While Jacob is related to Esau as a brother, Esau maintained his animosity and disdain for Jacob. Today, while the U.S. has negotiated with Iran in good faith, Iran seems to have been working with an entirely different agenda.

Last week, after failing to reach a final negotiated settlement with Iran to curtail its nuclear program and ensure that Iran could not produce a nuclear weapon, both sides agreed to once again [extend the negotiations](#) for another seven months. Yet, while both sides expressed hope that they could reach a comprehensive agreement in the allotted time, according to the [New York Times](#), Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, “dismissed the diplomatic and economic pressure that world powers had brought to bear on his country over its nuclear ambitions.” On his personal website he wrote that, “In the nuclear issue, America and colonial European countries got together and did their best to bring the Islamic Republic to its knees, but they could not do so—and they will not be able to do so.” Moreover, the mere mention of the United States in the Iranian parliament led to the usual chants of “Death to America.”

America extends gestures of brotherhood, and Iran sees these acts as the capitulation of an adversary. It is now clear that just as tough pressure brought Iran to the negotiations, the threat of additional pressure can strengthen America’s bargaining position. Congress must take up new bipartisan sanctions legislation to let Tehran know that it will face much more severe pressure if it does not clearly abandon its nuclear weapons program.

When Esau addressed Jacob as an adversary, Jacob took critical steps to prevent Esau from becoming a threat. The United States must take similar steps to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon. ■

### Overcoming Adversity

**And Jacob came complete... (Genesis 33:18)**

**ויבא יעקב שלם (בראשית לג:יח)**

Captain Derek Herrera was born into a military family, and followed that tradition by joining the Marines, serving three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with relief work in Haiti. On his third tour as commander of an elite force with the Marines, his team came under attack. A sniper’s bullet pierced Herrera’s spine, paralyzing him from the chest down. Yet, despite being shot in the back and additionally fighting a collapsed lung, Captain Herrera got on the radio and coordinated the team’s rescue.

From that day forward Captain Herrera was paralyzed from the waist down. Determined to still live the fullest life possible, Captain Herrera researched options for a paralyzed person to walk again, and learned about the [ReWalk robotic exoskeleton, developed in Israel](#), that allows the paralyzed to stand and move on their own. He applied to be part of the trials but was turned down for medical reasons. So he applied again and again. Finally, ReWalk was approved for private purchase, and money was raised to help him be the first U.S. purchaser of the device.

Among the reasons he wanted to walk again was to keep a promise he had made to himself. Captain Herrera had been awarded the Bronze Star for his heroism in Afghanistan, and he promised himself he would walk up and receive the medal on his feet, rather than on his back or in a wheelchair. Finally, after intensive rehabilitation, Captain Herrera fulfilled that promise. Using that amazing Israeli invention, Capt. Herrera walked up to his commanding officer at Camp Pendleton in San Diego in front of 300 of his fellow Marines, and was finally awarded that Bronze Star.

There's another part of this story. Having experienced the power of this innovation from Israel, Captain Herrera wanted to see the country for himself, meet the inventor, and see the university where the product was developed. He traveled to Israel, learned more about the impact Israel has on the world and how the country is helping people. He is now an Israel advocate. He has joined the Board of the American Technion Society and is working with them on the development of new products for the paralyzed. He's also [committed himself to sharing his story and helping others](#) like him overcome the challenges that they face.

Our forefather Jacob represents the biblical figure best known for overcoming adversity. During his lifetime he overcame exile, animosity, physical threats, and a night-long struggle with a celestial angel. Yet, these challenges forged his personality and gave him the strength to father a nation. Commenting on the verse, "And Jacob came complete..." (verse 18) the Midrash (Midrash Rabbah Bereishit 79) derives this lesson from a verse in Psalms. "Many are the ills of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Psalms 34:20). The Midrash explains: "'Many are the ills'—this refers to Esau and his generals; 'the righteous'—this is Jacob; 'but the Lord delivers him out of them all' – [this refers to the verse] 'and Jacob came complete.'" Jacob was complete when he overcame the challenge of facing Esau.

Just as Jacob overcame great obstacles on his path to greatness, others have followed in his footsteps, setting powerful examples for us to emulate. Captain Derrek Herrera's strength, spirit, and desire to give back to others follows in the footsteps of our forefather, Jacob, and serves as an inspiration for each of us to follow in our own lives. ■

## Helping Others

**And he encamped before the city (Genesis 33:18)**

**ויחן על פני העיר (בראשית לג:יח)**

The people of Israel have always worked to improve the lives of others, even in our earliest history. We learned this lesson from Jacob's example. Commenting on the verse, "And [Jacob] encamped before the city [of Shechem]", (verse 18) the Talmud (Shabbat 33b) explains that Jacob instituted important innovations for the local population: "Rav said that he established a monetary system for them. Shemuel explained that he instituted markets for them. Rabbi Yochanan explained that he established bathhouses." According to each position, Jacob improved the lives of the local population by sharing his knowledge and wisdom to bring prosperity to the people of Shechem.

As Africa continues to contend with Ebola, Israel committed to doing its part to help African nations address and control the deadly virus. Earlier this month, [Israel sent cargo containers](#) containing the equipment and supplies necessary to construct portable field hospitals critical to containing the spread of Ebola in Sierra Leon, Liberia and Guinea, where the bulk of Ebola deaths have occurred. Israel will also send staff to construct the clinics when the equipment arrives in Africa, and will facilitate contact between Israeli NGOs and the local African governments to send Israeli volunteers, medical staff, doctors, paramedics and nurses from Israel. In this way, the modern state of Israel follows in the footsteps of our forefather, Jacob, sharing its knowledge and prosperity to improve the lives of others around the world. ■

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