



Sermon Tidbits

NOVEMBER 16, 2015

Parashat Vayitzei

The Dream of Peace

And he dreamed (Genesis 28:12)

ויחלם (בראשית כח:יב)

“Why does the eye see a thing more clearly in dreams than the imagination when awake?” wondered the great Leonardo da Vinci. Rabbi Moshe Bleicher, in his work *L'mahalach Haparshiot*, (p. 180) offers an explanation from the dreams of Jacob in this week's parashah. He writes that, “Our Sages taught that a person dreams that which is in the depths of his heart. A dream expresses the deep subconscious within a person. During sleep he is freed from the rational and limited sensory perspective, and his subconscious can appear without limitation—in the form of a dream.” Jacob dreams of “a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven...” (Genesis 28:12) His dream represents the manifestation of the divine connection between heaven and earth. His greatest desire—to establish that divine connection between heaven and earth through his actions—appeared to him through his dreams.

Rabbi Benzion Firer, in his work *Panim Chadashot B'Torah* (see v. 1 pp. 159-160) explains that a different part of this very same dream gave Jacob guidance and strength during the most challenging, difficult times in his life. In the very same dream God appeared to Jacob and told him, “I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back into this land; for I will not leave you...” (28:15) Rabbi Firer writes, “This dream was critical to Jacob so that he could ultimately struggle with the angel of Esau without abandoning hope. [We later read that] ‘Jacob remained alone, and a man struggled with him until first light.’ (Genesis 32:25) From where did Jacob draw the strength to struggle with the Minister of Esau all alone? Rather, after he dreamed his first dream, he was never again alone. This dream remained with him during every struggle along the way, and from it he drew his indomitable strength.” Rabbi Firer notes that our national ability to dream gave us the fortitude to ultimately return to Zion. “The Psalmist wrote, ‘When Adonai brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like dreamers.’ (Psalms 126:1) Only those who dream can merit to return to the Land after a two-thousand-year-long exile. Someone who does not know how to dream cannot persevere...”

At the recent rally in Rabin Square in Israel marking the twentieth anniversary of the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, two American leaders spoke of the power of Rabin's dream for peace. Former President Bill Clinton, a close personal friend of Rabin's, [told the crowd](#) of over a hundred thousand that, “after all the fighting and battles [Rabin] engaged in, he never stopped seeing other people, including his adversaries, as human beings. He refused to give up his dream of peace in the face of violence.” President Obama, in a video message, [expressed a similar sentiment](#). “A bullet can take a man's life but his spirit, his dream for peace will never die,” Obama said.

With ongoing, seemingly daily acts of violence against Israelis coupled with a campaign of incitement, the dream of peace seems more distant than ever. Yet, Israel has never, and will never abandon the dream of peace with her neighbors, including the Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu [reiterated Israel's commitment to this ideal](#) during his visit to the White House when he said that, “I want to make it clear that we have not given up our hope for peace—we'll never give up our hope for peace,” Mr. Netanyahu said. “And I remain committed to a vision of peace of two states for two peoples...” As long as we continue to dream, that dream guides us as we remain committed to taking the necessary steps to transform that dream into reality. ■

Giving Thanks on Thanksgiving and Beyond

This time I will praise the Lord (Genesis 29:35)

הפעם אודה את ה' (בראשית כט:לה)

Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday. No other nation around the world gives thanks the way we Americans do—by watching football and eating turkey. Yet, in addition to the physical aspects of Thanksgiving, Jews strongly identify with the core value of the holiday: the notion of giving thanks. In fact, the Jewish people have the value of Thanksgiving built into our very identity, thanks to one of the *imahot* (foremothers), Leah.

Interestingly, it is not Jacob that names tribes of Israel, but Leah and Rachel. Following the birth of her fourth child, Leah declares that, “‘This time will I praise the Lord,’ therefore she called his name Judah.” (29:35) Judaism—and the Jewish people—take the name from Judah. The word “Jew” (*yehudi* in Hebrew) is derived from the region of Judah (Judea) where the remnants of Israel survived following the exile of the Ten Tribes. Our appellation (*Yehudim*) is directly linked to the Hebrew word for “giving thanks” (*L'hodot*, as in *todah rabbah*—“thank you very much”).

Commenting on Leah’s beautiful sentiment the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 71) writes, “Leah grabbed the art of [giving] thanks, and from her emanated people expert in giving thanks... David said, ‘Praise to the Lord who is good,’ and Daniel said, ‘To You the God of my fathers I give thanks and praise.’” Rabbi Jessica Locketz [notes](#) that Judaism views every day as a day of thanksgiving: “From the words we say upon arising—‘*Modeh ani l'fanecha*,’—‘I give thanks to You (for compassionately restoring my soul)’—to the daily multitude of blessings and prayers in our worship services, our tradition teaches us that showing gratitude is part of our way of life. Every day brings ample opportunities for acts of mindfulness and thanksgiving that can transform our lives and repair the world.”

One of the forms of thanks in Jewish liturgy relates specifically to the Land of Israel. In the second blessing of *birkat hamazon*—Grace after Meals, we recite: *Nodeh Lecha*—“We are thankful to You, Adonai our God, for having given the heritage of a lovely fine and spacious land to our fathers...” This year, as we sit around the Thanksgiving table and offer words of thanks for the blessings in our lives—family, friends, health and prosperity—as Jewish Americans, passionate in our support for a strong Jewish state, we must also give thanks for the blessing of living in an era of an independent, free and democratic Jewish state, which has served as a blessing not just for the Jewish community, but for the world. We live in an era that our ancestors could only have dreamed about: on the one hand, we, their descendants enjoy the great blessings of freedom and equality that the United States affords all of her citizens, which we celebrate on this uniquely American holiday. But our ancestors also hoped and yearned for a homeland for the Jewish people—a miracle that we are blessed to witness in our lives, but which demands our support as well.

Yet, we must also expand the idea of Thanksgiving beyond our dining room tables this coming Thursday. We must also express *hakarat hatov*—“recognition of good works” to those that have supported the freedom and safety of the people of Israel. Earlier this month, as Israel found itself in the throes of a wave of terror which has maimed and killed dozens of Israeli citizens, including women, children and the elderly, 369 members of the U.S. House of Representatives sent a bipartisan letter to Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas urging him to end the recent wave of Palestinian incitement to violence. The House of Representatives also adopted a bipartisan resolution, H. Res. 293, condemning the recent wave of Palestinian terror attacks on Israel. Authored by Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) and Ted Deutch (D-FL), the resolution urged President Abbas and other PA officials to discontinue all incitement and exert influence to discourage such activity within Palestinian civil society. Last week the Senate followed suit, adopting by unanimous consent a bipartisan resolution with 68 cosponsors, introduced by Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), standing with Israel and condemning the recent wave of Palestinian terror attacks.

While this Thursday we will give thanks only in the comfort of our homes, we can and must do more. We must [make the effort to say thank you](#) to our elected representatives who continue to stand with Israel and work to bring safety and security to Israelis under attack. ■

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