PARSHAT VAYISHLACH
DECEMBER 1, 2012
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A woman gave birth to her firstborn, a boy, and both she and her husband wrangled about what to name him. The husband wanted the newborn boy to be named after his father. She wanted the boy to be named after her father. Interestingly enough, the names of both grandparents were the same, Nathan. They came before a wise man who was asked to settle the issue. "You see," claimed the wife, "my father was a pious man, a great scholar. My husband's father was a plain, ordinary thief. How can I name my son after a thief?"

"My decision," said the wise man, "is to name the boy Nathan. If he turns out to be a scholar then you will know that he was named after his mother's father. If he turns out to be a thief, you will know that he was named after his father's father."

We all know that the naming of a newborn is a significant moment not only in the young baby's life, but in the family's life as well. Much thought is given to the name and its meaning, as it is by this name that the person is known throughout the course of his lifetime.

There are two naming stories in our Torah reading of this morning. One of them involves Jacob, whose name is changed to Yisrael. Jacob is renamed after his nighttime struggle when an angel of G-d bestows his new name upon him. It is reaffirmed in our Torah portion by G-d himself, this time in the Promised Land. Jacob, by becoming also Yisrael, is the true heir to the Abrahamic promises, the one through whom the nation of Israel is to come into being.

There is another name given in our Torah reading this morning and this time there is a dispute as to its meaning. After Jacob leads his family back into the Promised Land and receives a promise from G-d at Bet El, he continues the short distance to Ephrath, where Rachel went into labor. She gives birth to a son, her second, and dies in childbirth. The Torah tells us: "But as she breathed her last – for she was dying – she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin." In the Book of Genesis it is the mother who named all of the children that were born to the patriarchs. Rachel followed suit. She names her son Ben-oni which has been understood as either "son of my sorrow," or "son of my vigor." It may mean that in her suffering she recognizes that she is about to lose her life and, therefore, he becomes the "son of my sorrow," or as understood by Robert Alter, "in her death agony, she envisages the continuation of 'vigor' after her in the son she has born."

This time, however, the father, too, names the child. Jacob calls him Benjamin which can be understood in a number of ways as well. Some understand it as "son of my right hand," that is a favorite son, as the right hand is considered the most powerful. Others interpret it as "son of the south," for the right hand also designates the south in biblical idiom. Still another commentator suggests that it means "son of my old age," which he clearly was to Jacob.

Both Jacob and Rachel saw what was happening. Rachel was dying in childbirth and her young child was now to be raised by a widowed father. Each interpreted the event differently

and, therefore, gave the child a different name. This time the father, unlike any other occasion, gives him the name which he will carry throughout his lifetime.

It is not unusual for people to witness the same event, but to understand it differently. The baby in our initial story is to be called Nathan, it just depends after whom he is named. The young child born to Rachel is basically given the same name by both his mother and father, but their interpretations vary and so does the implications of the meaning of the name.

In 2008 a movie, Vantage Point, appeared on the screen with a very interesting premise. The President of the United States is in Salamanco, Spain, about to address the city in a public square. We see a number of people in the area along with the President. Shots ring out and the President falls; a few minutes later, we hear a distant explosion, then a bomb goes off in the square. The movie attempts to show how various people understood the events of that moment. After that scene is shown, like a massive tape being rewound, the movie goes back to the beginning. This time the same story is told from the vantage point of the President's entourage. Once that is done, it is rewound once more. This time an American tourist gets the story told from his vantage point. Again the movie rewinds and this time the Secret Service agents tell the story from their vantage point. The message of the movie is clear. We may all see the same event, but our interpretation of it may be vastly different. It is in that interpretation that our understanding of the event is molded and we then interpret it once more to others with whom we share the information.

We are but a week from the tenuous cease fire between Israel and Hamas. After the fact, many interpretations have been given as to what actually happened, why it occurred and what are the short-term and long-term effects of Operation Pillar of Defense. As soon as the cease fire went into effect Hamas claimed that it was the victor. Although many terrorist leaders were killed, much of its munitions destroyed, many of its command centers incinerated, they felt that since they had survived the Israeli aerial onslaught and lived for another day, they were the ones who were victorious. Israel, and many of its citizens, had different opinions. Some were disappointed that the cease fire was called and that Hamas, with its many rockets, still remained in power. Others were pleased that Israel's fire power had once more shown that rockets could not rain down upon Israel's civilian population with impunity. Some claimed it was the new President of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, who was really the victor as everything seemed to go through him as Egypt became once more a key player. Still others claimed that it was President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton who showed that only the United States had the power to truly make a difference in the Middle East and effectuate, at least short-term, the end of the warfare. The facts are all the same, the interpretation was in the eye of the beholder.

Barry Rubin, the Director of the Global Research in International Affairs Center at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzilya, wrote that in truth Israel was the winner. Israel, he suggested, couldn't have been expected to overthrow Hamas and yet the amount of regional support Hamas received during the recent war was remarkably low. The supposedly greatest military achievement of Hamas was sending missiles in the direction of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, but the Iron Dome system shot down most of them and relatively little damage was done. Israel learned lessons from its war with Hezbollah as well as from the last Gaza war in 2008-2009, and this time used the social media effectively. "So," he writes, "Israel won the war. The problem is

that word used 'won' has limited significance and 'winning' doesn't remove the problem and bring long-term peace. That, however is in the nature of the situation, and not in the war itself."

Fareed Zakaria, the CNN analyst and commentator, wrote an op-ed piece on November 21 in the *Washington Post*. He suggested that Israel now dominates the new Middle East. Israel's weapons are far more sophisticated, often a generation ahead of those used by its adversaries. Its technology advantage has profound implications on the modern battlefield. Israel's astonishing economic growth, its technological prowess, its military preparedness and its tight relationship with the United States has set it a league apart from its Arab adversaries. Peace between Palestinians and Israelis will come only when Israel decides that it wants to make peace.

I am sure that if I read the Arab press that I would find a different story as to what occurred during the days of this recent Gaza war. We do know that peace is not yet at hand and military preparedness must continue. We do know that continuing diplomatic pressure from the United States on Israel's adversaries to accept Israel's right to exist must continue. We do know that it is our task to help Israelis rebuild their lives after the tremendous upheaval of rockets and air raid sirens; of sleeping in shelters and of destroyed cars and buildings.

This is only one battle in the continuing fight for Israel's survival and acceptance in the Middle East. It continued this past Thursday at the United Nations when on Partition Day, November 29, the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, asked for non-members status for a Palestinian state in the U.N. General Assembly. It was a foregone conclusion that it would be accepted. For the Jewish world November 29, 1947, was seen as a day of acceptance of the idea that a Jewish national homeland in the ancient land that has been our focus from the days of our patriarchs and matriarchs was now accepted by the nations of the world. For the Arab nation that dwells in that area and outside of it, it is seen as a disaster.

We commend the eight other nations who stood with Israel and voted against the resolution: United States, Canada, Czech Republic, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Panama, Nauru and Palau.

We are a long way from a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. Bryna and I leave Sunday for a short trip to Israel and we pray that we may bring back a message of hope from our family, from our students who are studying there, and from our people who reside in the land. We are a resilient people, we are a people who refuses to give up hope that one day we will be accepted in the Middle East, that there will be a peaceful solution to this intractable situation, and that Israel will celebrate years of security so that it can thrive and bring the entrepreneurial spirit of its citizens to its neighbors and to those that reside in its midst. Only then will there be peace among nations and no longer will we fear war. Until that time we must act like our ancestor Jacob did when he prepared for his meeting with Esau by using intelligence gathering, defensive measures, and prayer, to enable him to be victorious over his brother. May we be as successful as well.