

Sermon Parashat VaYishlach 5767

"You have nothing to fear but fear itself: It's not always true" Rabbi Jay M. Stein

It doesn't matter whether we live in an apartment or a house, our living space makes noise. As we are lying in bed just before sleep, we have quiet moments usually accompanied by these sounds. The sound could be something outside like an animal going through the garbage or something inside like the dishwasher or the heat turning on. Sure enough there are sounds. They are real, not imagined. When I was growing up and heard these sounds, I would yell to my parents, "I heard something." They would always say the same thing. "It's an old house and it is settling." You should know this left me a little unsettled. Was the house going to fall down? Was my room in the converted attic going to fall the furthest? At least it wasn't what I thought it was, a burglar climbing up the side of the house to my room. I'll be honest; I never thought it was a monster in my closet or even the boogiemer. I just thought it was someone trying to break in. However, my parents would easily put these fears to rest and then I would go to sleep. It turns out my fears were unfounded but that doesn't mean they were any less real. That is the story of Jacob and his brother Essau.

After twenty years of separation, the two brothers are about to be reunited. Twenty years is a long time and Jacob struggles with tactic and approach. It is time enough to imagine the confrontation that could happen when he finally meets Essau face to face because Jacob did steal the birthright. Jacob has had twenty years to replay that moment over and over in his mind. He just knows that, even in this vast world, their paths will cross again, so in his mind it's just a matter of when. Before they run into each other Jacob sends messengers ahead to see who and what is coming and then report back. Possibly he wants to make first contact and evaluate the situation or maybe it's just to take a look.

The messengers go ahead and when they return Jacob's fear intensifies. The Torah tells us he was afraid and anxious. Rashi explains that when his messengers return and report hundreds of people are amassing on the boarder between them, Jacob is afraid and anxious. Rashi said he was afraid because he thinks he might be killed and anxious because he might have to kill. The messengers return with nothing reassuring and Jacob's mind again goes to confrontation. He can't envision, even in his wildest imagination, that Essau will want to simply kiss and make up so he thinks of conflict and armed struggle. Midrash Hagadol offers us the most insight into Jacob's psyche. It says, "Lifi she yadah b'esav she'eyn bo yirat shamayim." The reason Jacob feared his brother was he knew Essau had no fear of God.

(Midrash HaGadol 32:8) Jacob's fears were such because he thought they were both working under entirely different entities. Midrash hagadol says, "Jacob ultimately believes that he and Essau were answering to different higher authorities. For Jacob it was God but for Essau it was himself. There was no way to estimate how far Essau would go. There was nothing to hold Essau back from attempting to completely wipe out Jacob's family even though this was twenty years after the conflict began.

At this year's General Assembly, Benjamin Netanyahu publicly announced that we are once again in Germany in the year 1938 and Ahmanidajad is Hitler. On some level I agree but I think his time-line is off. It's not 1938 but 1981. Twenty-five years ago on June 7, at precisely 3:55PM, Israel flew the first F-15 and F-16's from the southern Etzion Air Force Base. They flew over Jordanian, Saudi, and Iraqi airspace and after a tense but uneventful low-level navigation route; the fighters reached their target. They popped up at 4:35 pm and quickly identified the dome

gleaming in the late afternoon sunlight. Iraqi defenses were caught by surprise and opened fire too late. In one minute and twenty seconds, the Osiraq reactor lay in ruins.

It is 1981 and Iran, once again under the banner of Islam, seeks to secure its Atomic ambitions. The differences between Essau and Ahmanidajad are many. Ahmanidajad has expressly stated his intentions. He has come to our soil, stood in the United Nations and unequivocally denied the holocaust, spitting in our face and taunting us. Essau never said he was going to kill Jacob yet he feared for his life. Ahamanidajad tells the world of his intention to kills us and to wipe Israel off the map.

There are real fears and imagined fears. Fear of Essau was imagined; fear of Ahmanidajad is not. As Congressman Lungren told our packed sanctuary on Sunday, December 3, 2006 (This was an incredible evening of support with U.S./Israeli commitment solidified through AIPAC.), “When an enemy tells you he is going to kill you believe him.” When your enemy tells you they want to kill you - believe them. Ahamnidajad is not answering to a higher authority. The Koran teaches of living peacefully. This is not Islam speaking - this is Islamo Fascism. There are real fears and imagined. This is a real threat. Our country must look at the entire chessboard and strategize accordingly.

So, like Jacob, we must prepare and we must do three things:

First, we must take our enemy seriously - perceived or otherwise.

Second, we must create an executable plan developed by military experts. (These military leaders must take consul from our greatest ally, Israel. Israel has never lost a war because they know if they loose they will no longer exist.)

Finally, we can't do this alone. We must develop and nurture allies who will stand by and with us at both the UN and on the battlefield. We need real support, not just nominal involvement on the periphery.

Midrash HaGadol teaches us two grave lessons at this crossroad.

- 1. There is no force to keep him in check.** Ahmandajad acts unfettered. Currently there is no force in place to stop him. Supposedly, the UN should stop him but it just emboldens him - we ought to be afraid.
- 2. Religious conviction is powerful** and Ahamanidajad has usurped the authoritative voice of God to further his misguided aspiration. He must be stopped.

When we walk through the airport or down city streets, most of us look at people who are different. We do this either openly or in our minds. A few weeks ago the comedic community took stock of itself because Michael Richards let loose a dangerous racial diatribe. Most of us have internal stereotypes, some closer to the surface than others, but we must hold these feelings in check. There are real fears and imagined fears. We cannot permit our imagined fears to manifest themselves in our behavior.

In a national survey, 73% of Americans said they believe that immigrants are either “somewhat” or “very likely” to increase crime. 73%. That is higher than the 60% who fear they are “likely to cause Americans to loose jobs.” That means we are more afraid of the crime they may bring than on the negative impact on our ability to find work. For whatever reason, be it reasonable or not,

we have a xenophobia that is palpable. Robert J. Sampson, chairman of the sociology department at Harvard University, in an article published in the American Journal of Public Health, showed that, “more immigrants, less crime” is actually closer to the truth. He showed careful analysis actually proves this theory unfounded. Sampson concluded and I quote, “In other words the fact that people think neighborhoods with large concentrations of brown skinned immigrants are unsafe, makes sense of the popular stereotypes and subliminal associations. However, that doesn’t mean there is any rational basis for their fears.” (New York Times Magazine Section 12/3/06 pages 20-22)

In his inaugural address FDR said, “You have nothing to fear but fear itself” he was only half right. There are real fears and there are imagined. This is a real threat - and we must act now. We must act diplomatically and economically so military options will not be necessary. However, if it becomes clear there is no other option, then we must have a solid plan along with staunch allies and supporters in the world community. There are real fears and imagined. To quote The Serenity Prayer, “God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” a (The Serenity Prayer is generally thought to have been written by Reinhold Niebuhr) There are real fears and imagined, I pray we are all given the wisdom to know the difference between the two.