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D'VAR TORAH

Linking Torah to Modern Israel

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וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן

Genesis 37:1 *Jacob settled in the land of his father's residence, in the land of Canaan.*

Jacob, after years of tumultuous wandering, finally returns to his childhood community. The opening words, for which the portion is named, show Jacob's desire to "settle down," and return to a permanent dwelling place. He had fled from home out of fear of retribution from his brother, Esau. He lived with his father-in-law, Laban, who tricked him into working for him three times as long as Jacob intended in order to marry Laban's daughter, Rachel. The *midrashic* collection *Bereshit Rabbah* comments on Jacob's intent to settle down."*When the righteous settle in peace, desiring to settle in peace in this world, Satan comes to accuse them*."(*Bereshit Rabbah*, 84:1) Rashi, a 12th century commentator, offers an alternative reading of this *midrash*. He posits that it G-d who asks righteous people who desire peace, "Is it [what you have] not enough?" Jewish tradition asserts that righteous people who ask for peace in their own time are greedy; they should know that true peace will only come during the Messianic Age.

Israelis are not pessimistic, they are instead realistic about the tumultuous neighborhood in which they live. Further, Jews worldwide, aware of growing global anti-Semitism, remain undeterred in their optimism for a more tranquil and less anxiety-ridden tomorrow. Israel will turn 70 in May 2018, and the majority of its population continue to hold out hope for a less violent, more settled, and routine future.

Since 1968, Israeli leaders have entered each set of peace talks with guarded skepticism. Many people recall the 1967 Khartoum Resolution in which Arab heads of state representing Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, and Sudan signed a resolution that, among other things, called for continued efforts to eject Israel from the Middle East. The third paragraph of the resolution has since been termed "The Three Nos," meaning 'no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel.' Hamas today has a similar attitude toward Israel, that these countries possessed in 1967.

In 1967, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 242. The preamble called for Middle Eastern countries to work for "a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in which every state in the area can live in security." Israeli leadership accepted the conditions of the resolution, however leaders in the Arab nations did not immediately agree to the provisions.

The 1978 Camp David Accords led to the signing of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in the following year. After three decades of contentious battle, the two nations' heads of state met in the United States for this unprecedented moment in Arab-Israeli relations. Fifteen years later, the Oslo Accords of 1993 signaled the possibility of a significant turning point in Palestinian-Israeli relations. Israeli and

Palestinian negotiators met in total secrecy in Europe and agreed to acknowledge one another's existence. Israel agreed to recognize the PLO as a partner for peace talks. The PLO, under Yassar Arafat, recognized the existence of Israel. Israeli leaders also agreed to recognize Palestinian self-rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Shortly afterward, the IDF began withdrawing from the cities of Gaza and Jericho in a "land for peace" deal. One year following the Oslo Accords, Jordanian and Israeli leaders signed a peace accord in October 1994 and each country opened its borders to the other.

The Oslo Accords set out a five-year transitional period which would provide an opportunity for the establishment of a Palestinian police force in the territories and changes to the PLO's charter that called for Israel's destruction. Israel would withdraw from Gaza and parts of the West Bank in a step-by-step process. Once Palestinians held elections for new leadership and governance, negotiators would return to the table to determine matters that would relate to a final agreement between Israeli and Palestinian representatives.

Despite these promising events, the Oslo Accords failed to end the ongoing conflict between Israeli and Palestinian communities. Violence in the region persisted. A follow-up to Oslo was attempted in July 2000 with a directive from President Bill Clinton, but PLO and Israeli leadership did not sign an agreement. Several other efforts were made by Europe and the US to move negotiations forward, however, they have not succeeded.

Despite the the failure to move forward in Palestinian-Israeli talks to produce a final arrangement, there remains a majority on both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli divide that supports ongoing efforts toward resolution of differences. Uriel Abulof, a political science lecturer at Tel-Aviv University and research fellow at Princeton University, states that "public opinion polls show substantial support for a two-state solution among Palestinians and Israelis, however both sides believe that the other side actually wants more" (Dead-end in the Gaza Strip, stalemate in the peace process).

Ongoing mistrust in Jewish and Arab aspirations and intentions fuels a degree of pessimism for those who long for a brighter future. Israelis today are less eager to make concessions to Palestinians due to the high level of political instability that exists on its borders. Yet, like their forefather Jacob, Jews in Israel will continue to "settle down" and strive for something beyond a frenzied and uncertain existence.

Discussion Questions:

Is there a point of no return for Israelis when they will cease attempts for negotiating for peace, or long term agreement with the Palestinians?

How does Israel balance its desire for long term peace with its need for immediate security for its citizens?

Additional Resources:

Nazarian, Younes and Soraya. (Dead-end in the Gaza Strip, stalemate in the peace process). UCLA, Center for Israel Studies, Podcast audio. October 1, 2014. http://www.international.ucla.edu/israel/article/144879

The Mid East Peace Process. http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/default.aspx