

## What will Hindsight Tell us about Our Negotiations with Iran?

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November 16, 2013

The saying that hindsight is 20/20 can refer to a wide variety of situations. It can pertain to historical events, to making tough personal decisions, financial investments, or career choices. The phrase applies to almost any situation. It means: if only we would know after a decision has been made what we knew when making the decision, then, perhaps we would have made different choices.

In our Torah reading this week Jacob expresses great trepidation over his impending encounter with Esau. He is so nervous and apprehensive that he divides his camp in two, sends messengers bearing gifts to appease his brother Esau and prepares for an all-out war, appealing to God for help. But in the end, Esau embraces his brother, and there is no armed confrontation. If only Jacob would have known later what he didn't know as he was making his way back to the land of Israel. With the advantage of 20/20 hindsight he would have been spared a great deal of anxiety. Instead of being up all night tossing and turning and wrestling, he would have gotten a good night's sleep before meeting his brother Esau.

75 years ago this past week, November 8 - 9, 1938, the Jews of Germany were subjected to an organized, well-planned pogrom known as *Kristallnacht*, The Night of Broken Glass. The sudden outburst of violence against Jews resulted in the deaths of 100 Jews, the rounding up and arrest of 30,000 Jews, the leveling of almost 300 synagogues and widespread destruction of personal and communal property. Thousands of Jewish homes, schools, businesses and synagogues were vandalized as police officers and firemen stood by and did nothing.

The Nuremberg Laws enacted by the Nazis earlier that year had already placed a number of severe restrictions on the Jews of Germany. Jewish owned businesses were boycotted and eventually seized along with many other actions to degrade, humiliate, isolate and marginalize the Jewish population of Germany which constituted a little less than 1% of the German nation.

But *Kristallnacht* marked a turning point. The anti-Jewish actions turned violent and were implemented on an unprecedented massive scale. As we all know, the conditions continued to worsen and it was the beginning of the end for the thousand years that Jews had lived in Europe as the Nazis began to implement the Final Solution and murdered 6 million European Jews.

If only people would have had the benefit of hindsight. They could have seen what was coming. In fact, many of the Jews of Germany sought to leave the country, but unfortunately most of them fled to surrounding nearby countries which soon came under Nazi domination and so in most instances they merely delayed their capture and demise.

40 years ago the Yom Kippur War broke out in Israel. The surprise attack on Israel was devastating. Prime Minister Golda Meir chose to ignore her instincts as well as the intelligence gathered by Israel's security agencies of a massive buildup of Egyptian forces on the Egyptian front in the Sinai. Concerned about the reaction of the United States and not wanting to risk a confrontation with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, she resisted suggestions of military advisers to launch a preemptive strike.

She regretted the decision the rest of her life. Although Israel succeeded in miraculously turning back the invading forces and managed to pull off a military victory which is studied today in West Point and

elsewhere for its daring brilliance, the impact of the first days of the war were devastating. It took Israel years to recover from its sense of defeat and the loss of life.

All of which brings us to our current ongoing negotiations with Iran over its nuclear capability. What will hindsight tell us about the decisions we make? We may very well look back on this time as a turning point.

I do not share the optimism of Secretary of State John Kerry or other Administration advisers and negotiators that Iran is committed to suddenly turning away from its goal of obtaining the capacity to have nuclear weapons and the capability of building missiles that can launch and carry those weapons. I worry that we merely project our rational thinking onto a regime which does not think or act rationally. We cannot fathom how a government would endure harmful economic sanctions to achieve what appears to us to be a nonessential goal. But therein lies the fallacy of our thinking. For a Shiite nation which believes its primary mandate is to dominate the region and to complete Hitler's work a nuclear weapon is not nonessential, but is as an essential part of its arsenal and its very *raison d'être*.

Just the other day I heard someone ask on a radio call-in show the obvious question raised by so many. Since Iran claims it needs nuclear energy for peaceful purposes the caller asked a not unreasonable question: "Why does a country that exports oil need to have nuclear energy?" Surely many of us have wondered the same thing. The response was that Iran needs nuclear energy since although it is an exporter of oil it imports gas since it cannot refine oil. The answer is one I have heard repeatedly.

As I was listening, I realized what I have never heard anyone say – If Iran needs nuclear energy because it cannot refine oil, then why not just use their wealth and other resources to develop the capacity to refine oil?! After all, it's not as if we are talking about rocket science. If it can employ scientists and engineers to work on developing nuclear energy, it could just as easily use those same resources to develop the capacity to refine oil. It is such an obvious solution to their plight.

But the problem is that then they would not be able to threaten Israel and the rest of the region.

Turning back to our Torah portion we see that after Esau and Jacob met each other and embraced, Esau suggested they drop their animosity and continue the journey together. Jacob however does not accompany him, choosing to take a different path. Our sages say he remained wary of Esau's intent and motives. He remained suspicious of the proclamations of peaceful intentions and was not naïve or deceived about the true nature of his adversary. The commentators say it was because he was concerned with the well-being and security of his family if he would let down his guard. A nuclear Iran is a threat not just to Israel, but to the Saudis, to the entire region, to Europe and even to the United States. We should learn from Jacob and his reluctance to accept the overtures of someone who had threatened to kill him.

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