



## Dimensions

❖ JOYCE S. ANDERSON Special to the Jewish Times

### Scorecard on Change Since January 20, 2009

President Barack Obama swept into office with his mantra of "Change you can believe in." Since the day of his inauguration, change has been happening with the signing of a succession of laws that affect the lives of women, men and children nationwide. However, the emphasis on Health Care Reform, the economic recession and the on-going wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have overshadowed these important new laws and the changes they have brought. Here's an update on what has been accomplished.

- **January 29, 2009.** The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act gave workers more time to sue employers for wage discrimination. Lilly Ledbetter had worked as a supervisor at a Goodyear Tire plant in Gadsden, Alabama, for 19 years – the only woman supervisor at the company. As she neared retirement, she received an anonymous letter listing the salaries of the men who held similar jobs as supervisors.

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She discovered, to her dismay, that the lowest paid man with far less seniority was being paid \$4,286 a month while she was earning \$3,727. Ledbetter filed a complaint with the Equal Opportunity Commission. Goodyear argued that she filed too late since Title VII requires employees to

file within 180 days of "the alleged unlawful employment practice." Since salaries and raises were confidential at Goodyear as at many companies, Ledbetter had no way of knowing the facts.

A jury trial ensued that gave her a stunning victory: \$233,776 in back wages and more than \$3 million in punitive damages. Goodyear appealed the jury decision and the case eventually reached the Supreme Court, which decided on May 29, 2007 in favor of Goodyear by a 5-4 vote. Sandra Day O'Connor was no longer on the High Court. Chief Justice John Roberts and Samuel Alito were the new appointees. The immediate reaction in both houses of Congress was to pass Fair Pay legislation. On July 31, 2007, The House of Representatives passed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act by a vote of 225 to 199 with little Republican support and a veto threat from President George W. Bush. In the Senate, the Fair Pay Restoration Act fell 4 votes short of 60 needed to reach the floor on April 23, 2008. Nine months later, when President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act into law, she was there to receive his thanks, a stirring introduction by Michele Obama and the applause of the people gathered at the White House.

- **February 4, 2009.** S-Chip, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, was renewed for 4 1/2 years and expanded to cover 4 million more children. President Bush had vetoed the expansion twice in 2007. There were supporters of the program in both parties who were concerned with the number of children without coverage. Opponents cited the costs and the proposal to tax revenue from tobacco products to fund the increased coverage. The new law, covering 11 million children, makes families with incomes up to 300 percent of the poverty level – \$63,600 for a family of four – eligible. The previous cutoff was 200 percent of the poverty level – \$42,400 for that same family.

- **March 30, 2009.** The Omnibus Public Lands Management Act designated millions of acres of federal land as wilderness. The struggle over public lands has pitted oil and natural gas developers against environmental activists for decades. Areas close to the nation's protected canyons in Arizona had been auctioned off at the close of 2008 to private companies. The U.S. Geological Survey had estimated that 1.2 million acres of Wyoming range land held large deposits of natural gas and oil.

see DIMENSIONS page 19 ►



### Two Meanings of Maturity

*Parshat Vayetze*  
(November 28, 2009)

How do you define "maturity"? The dictionary definition asserts that it is a state of being full-grown, ripe, or fully developed. But I think that the common man gives a subjective definition to maturity in one of two other ways.

Maturity, depending upon whether one tends to be idealistic or leans toward cynicism, seems to carry one of the following meanings:

Either one takes the position that maturity is associated with the wisdom gained from experience over time. From this point of view, the mature person is one who has learned from all that has happened to him and has developed, if not an infallible system that answers all questions, then at least an approach to life that is practical, informed, and wise.

Or, one takes the position that maturity is the state reached when one realizes that his childhood dreams were just that: dreams, and no more. One who is mature has learned to abandon youthful ideals, surrender impractical hopes and plans, and settle for reality and its limitations.

Which definition of maturity is yours, dear reader? Is maturity associated with wisdom? Or is the mature person the one who has learned to live a practical and cautious life, without ideals and utopian dreams?

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat

Vayetze, we have the opportunity to read about the maturation of our patriarch Jacob. The portion begins with a dream, a sublime dream. Toward the middle of the portion, Jacob dreams again, this time a very businesslike, down to earth, practical dream.

Jacob's first dream, the sublime one, envisions a ladder firmly rooted into the earth but extending heavenwards. However one interprets it, and creative interpretations abound, it is a majestic glimpse of infinite possibilities, of ideals of immense significance.

If anything, it is a grand imaginative symbol of the relationship between man and God, and of the former's potential to connect with the latter.

But then, Jacob spends his years working for his uncle Laban. He is busy with mundane affairs; in his own words, "scorched by heat all day, and freezing at night." He is busy, nay preoccupied, with business affairs, with profit, with practical material matters.

And he dreams again. But the second time, his dream is far from sublime. He sees "that the he-goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled, and mottled." Things are going his way in the world of sheep-raising. Every trace of another higher world is missing.

If Jacob's second dream would end at this point, we could say that he matured in the second, cynical, sense. His initial dream was a

see WEINREB page 6 ►