

NOVEMBER 26, 2007

Parashat Vayeishev

Sweet Dreams

Vayis'n'u oto “And they hated him” (Genesis 37:4)

Clearly, Yosef did not have a good relationship with his brothers. What is not so clear from the sidra is the cause of the brothers' hatred. Ramban explains that it was actually a combination of factors that caused the brothers to hate Yosef. Yaakov's favoritism was one. Yosef's dreams and his behavior were two others. We can understand how the brothers, playing second fiddle to Yosef in their father's eyes, hated Yosef for being favored. It is also understandable that they hated Yosef because of his behavior – our Sages relate how Yosef was an immature, vain teenager who cared too much about his hair and good looks.

From the dawn of time, human beings have had dreams – some imagine their own personal gain while others dream for the sake of others. It is easy to have a dream, but can be very difficult to take action to see it through to reality. Yosef knew such difficulty. So did the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Since the beginning of her modern history, the State of Israel has had a dream. It began as a Hope – *l'hiyot am chofshi b'artzeinu*. After two thousand years in exile, the dream to return to our homeland was realized. In the past sixty years, living in peace has become the dream. No more suicide bombings. No more Katyushas and Kassams. No more talk of driving the Jews into the sea or wiping the Jewish state off the map.

As the United States, Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) participate in the U.S.-hosted meeting in Annapolis this week, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert continues to reiterate Israel's strong desire for peace. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has announced important reform measures and has rejected violence, but for real progress to be made, the PA must vigorously combat terrorism. The Arab states also have a vital role to play in encouraging peace efforts by recognizing Israel, rejecting terror and providing strong backing to Abbas so he can join Israeli leaders in making the necessary historic compromises required for peace.

Making the dream of peace a reality will take a great deal of hard work and commitment. It is clear that such a commitment exists on the Israeli side. We pray that the events of this week provide evidence of similar intentions and abilities on the part of the PA and Arab states. ■

Taking Action

Vayeired Yehudah mei'eit echav “And Yehudah went down from his brothers” (Genesis 38:1)

After helping his brothers sell Yosef into slavery and tell Ya'akov that he had been devoured by a wild animal, Yehudah strikes out on his own. One might assume that Yehudah's decision to move on and settle down elsewhere is not connected to what happened to Yosef, but Rashi explains otherwise. After seeing their father's grief, the brothers

removed Yehudah as leader because it was his idea to sell their little brother. Despite the fact that the other brothers wanted to kill Yosef, they say to Yehudah, “You said to sell him. Had you said to return him, we would have listened.”

The truth is that we never know the impact we can have on a situation until we try. Had Yehudah ordered his brothers to leave Yosef alone, perhaps they would have listened.

U.S. and international sanctions imposed on Iran are having a significant effect on its economy, raising the costs and risks for foreign companies to do business with the country. In late October, the United States enacted a new round of sanctions against key state-owned Iranian banks and Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Such actions have increased the intensity of the debate within Iran over the wisdom of the country’s nuclear program. The international community should join the United States in a comprehensive economic, diplomatic and political sanctions campaign to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.

It is not too late for us to take action to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons. We don’t want to be like Yehudah – wondering what we might have done differently and what pain our actions might have spared. ■

In the Open

V’chisinu et damo “*And covering his blood*” (Genesis 37:26)

Having thrown Yosef into a pit, the brothers are confronted with a grim choice: murder him themselves or find another way to “get rid” of him. Spotting the caravan of Ishmaelites, Yehudah asks what benefit they will derive from killing Yosef and covering it up. Obviously, their behavior is so horrible that they would have to conceal it or face punishment. The Kotzker Rebbe taught of this verse, “when you have to cover up your behavior, it is a sign that you are doing something wrong.” (HaRebbe MeKotzk 94).

There is no shortage of deception in the politics of the Middle East – Iran alone spent twenty years lying to the international community to cover up its illegal nuclear program. But Hamas has turned covering up into an art form with its ongoing attempt to build Gaza into a terror stronghold.

Since Hamas’ takeover of Gaza in June, terrorists have fired nearly 1,000 rockets and mortars into Israel. On October 29, terrorists in northern Gaza were caught on video using a school as a launching pad for attacks. Beyond the crude Qassam rockets that are fired indiscriminately at Israel and have a range of 5 to 7 miles, Hamas is using more sophisticated weaponry. On Oct. 7, terrorists fired a Katyusha rocket at Netivot, a town in southern Israel nearly seven miles from the border with Gaza.

Beyond the rocket fire – which takes place in relatively open spaces – Hamas is increasing its smuggling of weapons into Gaza and developing its military capabilities at an unprecedented rate. The head of the Israeli army’s Gaza Division, Brig.-General Moshe Tamir, said Hamas is developing a complex military infrastructure by “trying to establish a bunker system as well as fortified rocket-launching and surveillance positions along the security fence with the Gaza Strip.” Hamas has smuggled 70 tons of explosives into the Gaza Strip since it seized control in June, Yuval Diskin, chief of Israel’s Shin Bet security agency, recently told the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

Think of the benefit to the Palestinian people if the money, creativity, and effort used to smuggle in these weapons were redirected to building civil and economic infrastructure! Hamas should learn the lesson of the Kotzker Rebbe and conduct themselves openly and honorably – like a real government. ■

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