

DECEMBER 10, 2007

Parashat Vayigash

The Big Picture

Hotzi'u kol ish mei'alai "Send everyone out from me" (Genesis 45:1)

Why did Yosef send the Egyptians out of the room before revealing his true identity to his brothers? Ramban explains that Yosef didn't want the Egyptians to hear about how the brothers had treated him. Yosef was concerned that, if the Egyptians heard how his own brothers had plotted against him and sold him, his siblings – indeed, the nation of Israel – would be seen as criminals with no respect even for their own families.

Yosef could have tried to explain the situation to the Egyptians. He could have told everyone that he was young and immature at the time, and he acted badly to his brothers. But Yosef understood that, no matter how well he might have explained their behavior, the Egyptians would have perceived his brothers negatively.

No one should ever suggest that American Jews should not speak their minds when it comes to Israel. But wherever we come down on the political and security issues impacting our brothers and sisters in Israel, we should recognize our unique ability as American Jews to be helpful and supportive. By working with our elected officials to make sure that the U.S. and Israel remain close allies, we present a unified face to Israel's many detractors around the world and in support of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship that is good for America.

Regardless of our personal opinions, we can all agree on the importance of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship. Such an alliance is good for the United States and good for Israel. We should always make sure that our first priority in protecting Israel is in making sure that these two great countries continue to work closely together. ■

Truth not Illusion

V'acharei chein dibru echav ito "And after all this, his brothers spoke with him" (Genesis 45:2)

Shortly after Yosef breaks down and reveals his identity to his brothers, he must reassure them that, indeed, he is truly Yosef. According to Rashi, he communicates in *lashon hakodesh*. Up until this point he had been communicating through the *meilitz* and he decided he must speak to them in their own language in order to assuage their fears. But Yosef knew that words must be followed with concrete actions. He didn't just speak to his brothers, he sent *agalot* as both a sign of his power and as a personal sign to his father that he remembered his learning and heritage

Words are important, but we all know that actions speak louder.

The Palestinian Authority must take concrete steps to put their words into action. It is not enough to talk the talk, they must walk the walk. The PA must act immediately to dismantle the terror infrastructure, dramatically increase its efforts to develop the institutions of a functioning civil society and to stop incitement against Israel. Additionally,

Arab States must contribute not only with their tongues in praise of historic compromise with Israel, but with their finances to ensure that the PA is strengthened and that Hamas remains isolated. President Abbas has recently taken some steps to crack down on Hamas charities, but these measures are not enough. Israel has released 429 prisoners as a measure of good will in order to build confidence in President Abbas and his government. Now is the time for the Palestinian Authority to reciprocate and to show through their actions that they are a serious partner for peace- intent on living side by side in peace and security with the Jewish State- resulting in “two states for two peoples”.

Abbas has stated that “the new opportunity must be exploited with seriousness and faithfulness.” For now, these are just mere words. Yosef, in our parashah, shows us through his words and, more importantly, through his deeds that he can not only be trusted, but respected. For the Palestinians, “now is the moment of truth and not of illusion.” ■

NIE Unpacked

K'chu lachem mei'erezt Mitzrayim agalot “Take wagons out of the Land of Egypt” (Genesis 45:19)

Having reconciled with his brothers, Yosef sends them immediately to retrieve Ya'akov and bring him down to Egypt. When word reaches Paroh, he commands Yosef to not just send the brothers home for their father, but to send an entire caravan with them. Why? Sforno, in his commentary on this *pasuk*, explains that Paroh knew that Ya'akov would not refuse to come down to Egypt if everything had been prepared in advance. Paroh understood that, the easier something seems, the more likely a person is to go along with it. And it is this seemingly innocent command of Paroh that brings all Israel to Egypt.

Prepackaged items – such as the wagons sent to bring Ya'akov to Egypt – may be easy, but they aren't always what's best. In fact, sometimes we have to unpack what's been prepackaged. On the radio and television this past week, we've heard a prepackaged description of the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran's nuclear program released last week. It is important, therefore, that we unwrap the packaging to understand exactly what the NIE says and what it does not say.

Iran's illicit nuclear programs continue and the danger remains. The NIE finds that Iran is continuing to enrich uranium and pursue nuclear weapons capability– the very reason why Tehran has been sanctioned twice by U.N. Security Council resolutions. The NIE also concludes that Iran is more vulnerable to international pressure than previously thought, saying that if Iran did indeed divert away from its weaponization program in the fall of 2003, it did so “primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure.”

It is vital to remember that the most difficult and important part of building a nuclear bomb is enriching or acquiring the fuel for a such a weapon, and while Iran may have made a tactical decision, as the NIE suggests, to focus on enriching uranium while holding off on actually “weaponizing” bombs, does not significantly change Iran's timeline for producing a nuclear weapon.

More tough economic sanctions and international offer the best way to stop Iran from building nuclear weapons. It should also be pointed out that, in response to the finding of the NIE that Iran may has suspended its weaponization program, Israeli Defense Minister and Labor Party Leader Ehud Barak said, "It is apparently true that in 2003 Iran stopped pursuing its military nuclear program for a certain period of time. But in [Israel's] estimation, since then it is apparently continuing with its program."

Aside from the issue of Iran's nuclear aspirations, it behooves us to remember that Iran is the world's largest state sponsor of terror and the main benefactor of Hizballah and Hamas. Far from exonerating Iran, as some media reports have packaged it, the NIE makes the argument for continued pressure on Tehran. ■