

DECEMBER 22, 2008

Parashat Miketz

Relationships that Matter

Vayishlach Par'oh vayikra l'Yosef – “Then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph” (Genesis 41:14)

Miketz chronicles Joseph's amazing rise to prominence and how his efforts saved the entire region from starvation. How does Joseph achieve his meteoric rise? Why does the Pharaoh specifically ask for Joseph to attempt to interpret his dreams? After all, how would the Pharaoh of Egypt have any knowledge of an unknown Hebrew slave languishing in prison? The Torah teaches that Pharaoh knew of him because Joseph had long before invested his time and energy to establish a relationship with an unknown and forlorn former royal vintner. While the royal vintner was in prison he befriended Joseph only because Joseph had exerted the effort and energy to help him. Two years later, after the royal vintner had returned to prominence, Joseph's efforts paid off. The vintner remembered Joseph and told Pharaoh about his friend, ultimately facilitating Joseph's historic role.

Joseph's story reminds us that building relationships with leaders takes place not when they have reached the pinnacle of success, but long before. Politicians who have achieved levels of national prominence and importance naturally look first not to new people for counselors, but to the people who have been with them from the beginning.

The same principle applies today as well. Politicians, foreign policy consultants, media analysts and other influential people all turn to trusted friends and advisers to help them understand important issues. As members of America's pro-Israel community we can do our part to influence American policy toward Israel in this same fashion. By taking the time to call and write our members of Congress, by inviting them to speak in our synagogue and by visiting their offices we have the opportunity to not only help them understand the issues, but to build relationships. Of course, the best way to build these relationships is by taking the time, like Joseph did, to befriend up and coming individuals before they reach positions of prominence.

This is the most fundamental and democratic aspect of American society. While many citizens do not want to seek elected office themselves, any of us can be a Joseph. Anyone can reach out to a local elected official, whose role might seem minor, to offer help and advice. Each of us can participate in the political process through our own involvement with candidates who capture our attention. Then, like Joseph, if and when the time comes for our input, the efforts we have made cultivating a meaningful relationship can truly make a world of difference. ■

Stockpiling

Vayitzbar Yosef bar - “And Joseph collected corn” (Genesis 41:49)

Our tradition teaches that Joseph collected an enormous amount of food during his efforts to save the people of Egypt. “And Joseph collected corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until they left off numbering; for it was without number.” (41:49) Rashi (on verse 49) explains this strange verse by teaching us that so much food was collected that “the counter stopped counting.” The rabbis (in the Midrash Hagadol) derive from this verse an interesting rule, “...that blessings are given to anything that is not numbered nor counted.”

While the food of Egypt was too numerous to count, unfortunately, today there are items which can be counted and which certainly do not bear blessings. One such example is Hizballah's revitalized stockpile of weapons, which now boasts some 42,000 rockets.

United States Defense Secretary Robert Gates wrote in the latest edition of Foreign Affairs that "Hizballah's restocked arsenal of rockets and missiles now dwarfs the inventory of many nation-states," referring to the terrorist army's massive weapons cache. In a recent speech to the Knesset, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak, revealed that in violation of U.N. Security Council resolution 1701 Hizballah has tripled the size of its arsenal since its 2006 war against Israel. In addition, according to Israeli defense officials, Hizballah has acquired new Iranian rockets with a range of 185 miles allowing it to target all major Israeli population centers. Moreover, according to Congressional testimony by Daniel Glaser, a top Treasury Department official, the Al-Quds Force, an elite branch of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has provided Hizballah with \$100 to \$200 million to help Hizballah rearm.

The United Nations must take action to update UNIFIL's mandate to ensure that Hizballah cannot threaten Israel. The international community must focus a spotlight on Hizballah's aggressive weapons stockpiling. If it fails to do so instead of the blessings and salvation that Joseph's "uncountable" bounty brought, the quantifiable amount of rockets Hizballah has stockpiled will one day unleash death, suffering and desperation on Israel's civilian population. ■

Speaking Roughly

Vayidaber itam kashot – “And he spoke roughly with them” (Genesis 42:9)

When Jacob was slowly running out of food in Canaan he sent his sons down to Egypt to purchase supplies. Joseph, now an Egyptian viceroy, recognized his brothers and chose to speak harshly with them, accusing them of “spying” on the land. “You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you have come.” (42:9) What did Joseph mean when he referred to the “nakedness” of the land? Ibn Ezra and Rashbam both suggest that this nakedness refers to the military weakness of Egypt – areas where enemies could attack and exploit the country. Yet, these Torah scholars also concede that Joseph used a term that connoted embarrassment and shame. Joseph claimed that his brothers' main goal was not to attack Egypt, but rather to shame his government. Therefore Joseph, as any national leader should, understandably dealt harshly with the suspected spies.

Just as Joseph chose to “speak roughly” with foreigners who had come to “reveal the nakedness of the land,” Israel too has recently found herself in a similar situation when it was forced to deny entry to Professor Richard Falk, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) explained that it refused entry to Professor Falk because of his highly politicized views, legitimizing Hamas terrorism and drawing shameful comparisons to the Holocaust. Further, the MFA claims that “the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories is particularly biased and distorted...it also dictates pre-established conclusions to the report, regardless of any real inquiry and findings by the Rapporteur. The mandate also ignores all human rights violations by Palestinians, either against Israelis or against other Palestinians. Thus, the rapporteur is prevented from considering, even if he wanted to, the issue of Human Rights violations by Palestinians.”

Israel makes great efforts to engage in constructive international scrutiny and dialogue. It cooperates with numerous international mechanisms to ensure human rights for Israelis and Palestinians. Yet, when a visitor comes with a clear agenda to “see the nakedness of the land,” and specifically return a negative and false report, Israel must take Joseph's tact with his brothers, “speak roughly,” and protect the rights and interests of its citizens. ■