

DECEMBER 14, 2009

Parashat Miketz

Wisdom for the Future

Ish navon vechacham – “A man understanding and wise” (Genesis 41:33)

Joseph advised Pharaoh to “seek out a man understanding and wise,” (41:33) and appoint him to prepare for the coming famine. What is the difference between understanding and wisdom? According to Ramban, Joseph meant that Egypt’s leader would require understanding to properly administer the country and wisdom to ensure that the wheat would not rot in storage. Ramban also suggests an alternative interpretation of wisdom, stating: “And Joseph said all of this so that they would choose him, *ki hachacham einav b’rosho*” – for the wise has eyes in his head. This rabbinic phrase alludes to a Talmudic statement (Tamid 32a): “Who is wise? One who sees the outcome [of events].” Rabbi Moshe Tzuriel wrote that “Joseph was ‘wise’ in that even at the beginning he was planning for a situation which would only happen seven years hence.”

While Joseph’s understanding helped him lead the Egyptians, it was ultimately his wisdom that guided him to make tangible plans for the future and moderate negative outcomes. Nowadays, the United States and Israel are acting with a similar wisdom, recently completing a joint air defense exercise designed to mitigate threats to Israel’s security.

Over the course of the last year Hamas has been upgrading its missile arsenal in order to increase the number of Israelis within their deadly range. During Israel’s Operation Cast Lead, Hamas fired rockets up to a range of around 25 miles, hitting the major port city of Ashdod. In late September, Hamas fired a missile with a 37 mile range and the IDF believes that Hamas has now obtained longer ranged Iranian-made Fajr missiles. The IDF has also discovered a new type of rocket fired from Gaza recently, the Russian-made S5K – the type used in battle in Afghanistan.

In order to prepare against this growing missile threat, the U.S. and Israel recently conducted their largest joint military exercise in history. The maneuver, code named Juniper Cobra 10, tested the two countries’ missile defense systems and included roughly 1,000 U.S. military personnel and a similar number of Israeli troops. The U.S. also deployed 17 warships equipped with radar systems to detect surface-to-surface missiles for the exercise, including the use of cutting-edge X-band radar technology, which is used to detect incoming missiles from hundreds of miles away. This new radar will provide Israelis with critical additional warning time in the event of a ballistic missile attack.

Joseph understood that a famine was coming and had the wisdom to make the arrangements which saved Egypt. By preparing to counteract the growing missile threats on Israel’s borders, the U.S. and Israel are demonstrating that they too are wise, and are taking steps to ensure the safety of Israel and the security of U.S. interests in the region. ■

Seeing From Afar

Vaya’ar Ya’akov – “And Jacob saw...” (Genesis 42:1)

We read that when the years of famine arrived, “Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt” (42:1). The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah Chapter 91) questions two details of the verse: How is it that Jacob saw the grain in Egypt (as opposed to hearing about it) and why was it that Jacob saw the grain but his sons did not? The Midrash answers that Jacob lost his prophetic vision when he thought that Joseph was dead. Yet, as he turned his attention southwards his prophetic visions returned and he saw that his salvation awaited him in Egypt. Thus, Jacob was able to see images

that his sons could not. While Jacob thought that his prophesized salvation would come through grain, his vision instead represented a reunion with his beloved son Joseph.

In ancient times Egypt had no way to advertise their successes and barring Jacob's prophetic vision the Israelites may have never discovered Egypt's abundance. In modern times we can share information via the internet and Israel's president has now harnessed this tool to share Israeli values and developments with the world.

Israeli President Shimon Peres recently launched his own YouTube channel, "in an effort to communicate with Israelis as well as citizens of countries with which Israel does not have diplomatic ties," the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz reported. Peres described his YouTube channel as a forum which will enable him to speak with people all over the world, host virtual press conferences where internet surfers will be invited to ask him questions, and conduct open and honest dialogue. On the channel's main page Peres writes that he hoped to use the channel to address three issues: "How to advance peace in the Middle East and the world, how to further reconciliation between different faiths and how to harness new technologies for the good of mankind." To view Israeli President Peres' YouTube channel, visit www.YouTube.com/Peres.

With Egypt lacking a mechanism to advertise their successes, Jacob was forced to rely on his prophetic power to learn of the country's bounty. Nowadays, Israeli President Peres' new YouTube channel allows Israel to directly project their societal advancements, and hopefully will help actualize Israel's own "visions" of Middle East peace. ■

The Wrong Choice

Shilchah hana'ar iti – "Send the lad with me" (Genesis 43:8)

Faced with the choice of sending his beloved son Benjamin to Egypt to procure food or starving to death, Jacob chose starvation. It was Judah who finally forced his father to see that his tactics made no sense, "Send the youth with me...and *we will live and not die.*" Why does Judah use this strange double language of "live and not die"? Rashi (on verse 8) comments that Judah told his father that they must act rationally, explaining that if Jacob refused to send Benjamin then he would certainly die of starvation. However, Benjamin's capture was a possibility and not assured. Thus, the possibility of Benjamin's capture was less risky than the sureness of starvation. Judah said to his father, "It is better for you to leave the uncertain [loss of Benjamin] and grab hold of the certain [food]." Seeing the acumen of Judah's words, Jacob told his sons to take Benjamin with them to Egypt to procure food for the family.

While Jacob's choice between releasing Benjamin to Egypt and feeding his family was difficult, he ultimately sacrificed his ideal outcome to realize his own best interests. Today, the Palestinians could learn from this example. While the Palestinian Authority's first choice is to hold out for preconditions, it's best interests lie in resuming negotiations with Israel and working to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the past several months Israel has taken important steps that serve to improve the lives of Palestinians and build confidence between the two parties. Israel has helped bolster the Palestinian economy and quality of life and removed scores of roadblocks in the West Bank. This past month, Israel also took the unprecedented step of declaring a temporary freeze on new construction in the West Bank. Still, the Palestinians have refused to return to the negotiating table, hoping that international pressure will force Israel to make further unilateral concessions. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu told his cabinet this week that, "It seems that the Palestinians have adopted a strategy of rejecting negotiations with Israel in order to avoid the demands of Israel and the international community which require compromises on their part. But this is a mistake. There can be no genuine solution without direct negotiations with Israel, in the framework of which, we will reach agreements and arrangements between the sides."

It was only when Jacob recognized that he had to sacrifice his ideal outcome that he was able to achieve positive results. The Palestinian leadership must now follow suit. Only negotiations, unfettered by the burden of preconditions, offer the possibility of finally ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ■

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