

JANUARY 19, 2008

Parashat Va'era

The Power of Unity

Hen B'nei Yisrael lo sham'u eilai - "The Children of Israel did not listen to me" (Exodus 6:12)

Rashi teaches us (see Rashi on 5:1) that when Moses appeared before Pharaoh the first time he did so without the support of the elders of Israel. In Rashi's words, "they retreated one by one from behind Moses and Aaron." Pharaoh clearly sensed the Jews' own inner turmoil and easily exploited that internal disarray for his own benefit. When God commands Moses to return to Pharaoh and again demand the release of the Jewish people Moses responds with bewilderment, "Behold, the Children of Israel have not listened to me. How then shall Pharaoh hear me?" Moses viewed his failure with Pharaoh as a direct result of the disunity amongst the Jewish people.

Moses' principle that a disjointed community will more easily be exploited is demonstrably true. Yet, its inverse is true as well: when the people are united their representative's message is magnified by the power and clarity of popular support. A message with that much strength has the ability to sway even the king of Egypt.

Thankfully, today the Jewish community in America enjoys a warm and healthy relationship with our elected representatives. Despite significant international pressure against Israel, American support for the Jewish State has remained strong because of the unity of our voices in proclaiming the righteousness of Israel's cause. It is this very virtue of Israel's cause which has led America's top leaders to stand up for the Jewish State. In fact, during Israel's conflict with Hamas in Gaza both then-President George W. Bush and then-President-elect Barack Obama reaffirmed Israel's right to self-defense. In addition, a bipartisan group of almost two hundred political leaders from across the United States have spoken powerfully and publicly in support of Israel. Further, both houses of Congress overwhelmingly passed resolutions supporting Israel's right to self defense with the Senate version passing by unanimous consent and the House version passing 390-5.

Israel enjoys American support due to the determination of our elected officials and their constituents who continue to back Israel during its time of need. Moreover, as Moses taught us, when we stand unified in our support of Israel's right to self-defense, the power of that unity speaks volumes. ■

Qualities of a Good Spokesman

Va'ani aral sefataim – "And I am of uncircumcised lips" (Exodus 6:12)

The Torah states that when God commanded Moses to appear before Pharaoh a second time Moses protested, "I am of uncircumcised lips." Moses' protest reminds us of his earlier argument to God at the burning bush when he described himself as, "heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue." (4:10) Commentators debate the meaning of Moses' cryptic references to his inability to speak. Rashi (on 4:10) explains that Moses suffered from a stutter, making his speech slow and clumsy. Rashbam suggests that Moses considered himself inadequate in the Egyptian language and thus insufficiently eloquent to speak before the leader of the free world. The Midrash, citing a well-known story (see Shemot Rabbah 1:26), suggests that Moses suffered an injury to his mouth as a baby which permanently damaged his ability to speak.

Assuming that all three explanations are correct then Moses had a stutter, was an inarticulate speaker and suffered from an oral injury – and still God chose him as the spokesman for the Jewish people. Thus, the Torah teaches that when the time comes to speak up, passion and truth are more important than the eloquence of the spokesman.

For many of us it is easy to feel like Moses standing at the doorway to Pharaoh's palace. Who are we to advocate for Israel? After all, there must be many people who are more knowledgeable, more articulate and more important than we are who can do a better job. Yet, nothing can be farther from the truth. Our elected representatives respond to us, their constituents, not because of our pomp, but because of our passion. They defend Israel not because of our command of the English language, but because of the shared values and freedoms that the United States and Israel have in common. For more information on how you can make a difference visit www.aipac.org/takeaction.

Each of us can impact the U.S.-Israel relationship and in times of need every one of us must make our voice heard. We must make the effort and take the initiative to contact our Representatives and Senators to let them know that their constituents support Israel. While we may think that we sound funny or have trouble finding the right words to say, the power and passion of our message will come through loud and clear. Just ask Moses. ■

An Adversary with No Heart

Kaved lev Par'oh – “Harden the heart of the Pharaoh” (Exodus 7:15)

This Midrash Agadah uses a parable about a lion, a fox, and a donkey to describe Pharaoh. The animals were traveling on a small boat when the donkey attempted to collect a travel tax from the other two passengers. The fox admonished the donkey, “How insolent you are! You dare demand that the king of the jungle pay a tax?” The donkey replied, “I collect from the king and place the money in his coffers.” The enraged lion tore the donkey apart and gave his carcass to the fox. “Arrange the body of this fool,” he said to the fox. The fox did as instructed but when he saw the heart of the donkey he stole it and ate it. Upon the fox's return the lion noticed the missing heart and demanded to know its whereabouts. The fox said, “My master, he had no heart. If he had a heart he never would have demanded a tax from the king.” The same was true of Pharaoh. If he had a heart he would never have demanded that God demonstrate his greatness. For this reason God told Moses, *kaved lev Par'oh*, literally “the heart of the Pharaoh is a liver.” In other words Pharaoh had no heart.

Today we could just as easily say, *kaved lev Hamas* – Hamas has no heart. The heart of Hamas has been replaced by a liver – full of bile, hatred and anger not only for the Jewish people, but for their own citizens as well.

Hamas has displayed its heartlessness as well as its lack of basic humanity. In fact, Hamas' principle tactic in the recent conflict with Israel has been fighting specifically from within civilian areas in order to generate media coverage and worldwide sympathy. Unfortunately, this tactic has paid off. In early January, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1860, a non-binding call for “an immediate ceasefire in Gaza leading to a full Israeli withdrawal, unimpeded provision through Gaza of food, fuel and medical treatment, and intensified international arrangements to prevent arms and ammunition smuggling.” The resolution fails to differentiate between Israel's legitimate acts of self-defense and Hamas' acts of terrorism. Conversely, the United States and Israel recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) pledging joint efforts to stem the flow of weapons to Hamas and other terrorists in Gaza. The agreement recognizes that Hamas' acquisition and use of arms against Israel were “the direct causes of recent hostilities” and that a durable and sustainable cessation of hostilities depends on denying weapons to terrorist groups and countering Iran's destructive activities. For more on the MOU please click [here](#).

Those who equate terrorism with the defensive measures used to combat terrorists only perpetuate conflict. While Hamas, like Pharaoh, has lost the heart and compassion that are basic human values, the United States continues to distinguish between those who work to guard human life and those who view innocent people as a currency to be traded for global sympathy. ■

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