

DECEMBER 30, 2008

## Parashat Vayigash

### Judah's Two Tactics

**Vayigash elav Yehudah – “Then Judah came near to him” (Genesis 44:18)**

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From the simple reading of the text, Judah takes a subservient tone when approaching Joseph. The Midrash, reading between the lines, sees a more aggressive tact on the part of Judah. Ba'al Haturim (on verse 18) notes that the gematria (numerical equivalent) of the words *vayigash elav Yehudah* equal both *zehu l'hilachem im Yoseph* – “this was to fight with Joseph” and also *gam nichnas u'payso* – “he also entered and appeased him.” Ba'al Haturim's comments highlight the two basic ways that one can deal with an adversary. First and foremost, we must try to negotiate – as Judah first does. But when talk proves ineffective and we cannot find common ground with an aggressive enemy, we must be willing to protect our interests as well.

With the conclusion of the six-month “period of calm” with the Hamas regime in Gaza, civilians living in areas surrounding the Gaza strip again find themselves bombarded with rockets and mortars fired indiscriminately from the Gaza Strip. Israel tried, through the “period of calm,” to allow sufficient goods to cross into Gaza. Israel facilitated the transfer into Gaza of more than 14,000 trucks, 185,000 tons of foods and other supplies, more than 7,000 tons of heating gas and more than 10 million gallons of fuel.

At every step, Hamas has responded with violence and incitement. In just the last six weeks alone more than 600 rockets and mortars were fired into Israel. Hamas also used the six month “calm” to double its stockpile of rockets – an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 – and to acquire rockets with longer range capabilities, including Iranian-supplied Katyusha rockets. An estimated 500,000 Israelis are now within range of Hamas' rocket arsenal, including Ashdod – Israel's fifth largest city and home to 200,000 people and Israel's largest port.

Israel, like every other sovereign nation, has the right to defend its citizens in accordance with the U.N. charter. The United States government must stand with Israel at the United Nations as it acts to defend itself in the face of continued violence from Hamas terrorists. We must never equate Israeli defensive measures with Hamas terrorism.

While Judah succeeded in negotiating with Joseph, Israel was forced to pursue Judah's second tactic in dealing with Joseph. Israel has the right *le'hilachem* – to fight to protect the rights of its citizens to live free of mortars and rockets raining down on their homes, businesses and communities. ■

### The Courage of Moral Leadership

**V'al yichar apcha b'avdecha - “Let not your anger burn against your servant” (Genesis 44:18)**

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In a stunning turn of events, Judah turned the table on Joseph. While once Joseph had the power - a viceroy constantly threatening the accused foreign spies - Judah stepped up and protested Joseph's treatment of his brothers. Rashi (on verse 18) explains that from the words, “let not your anger burn,” “from this we learn that he spoke with [Joseph] harshly.” Judah took considerable risk with his protest to Joseph. Not knowing that this was his brother, Judah had to

be aware of the army standing behind Joseph, and the danger he faced in speaking harshly with Joseph. Judah proved his right to be the father of the tribe of the king of Israel with his mettle and courage in standing up to Joseph.

In order to lead, one must have the strength and confidence to stand up for the right things – even in the face of great pressure. Recently, we witnessed just such an example of leadership when the Dutch foreign minister threatened to boycott a UN racism conference if anti-Israel statements are not scrapped from draft texts being drawn up for the meeting. Maxime Verhagen told Dutch Radio he "will not be involved in anti-Semitism" at the April meeting in Geneva. Israel and Canada already have withdrawn. The United States has protested the conference, but has not decided if it will attend. "It seems like the sole intention is to criticize Israel and condemn the West for slavery and its colonial history," Verhagen said. At the last conference in South Africa in 2001, Israel and the United States walked out midway because of a draft resolution equating Zionism - Israel's founding ideology - with racism.

Like Judah, the Dutch government has demonstrated its willingness to stand up for what it believes to be right, protesting against international anti-Semitism. Like Judah, its courage to defend Israel despite overwhelming pressure indicates its readiness to take a leading ethical and moral role in the international community. ■

## Brothers and Sisters

### **Ki l'michyah sh'lachani Elokim lifnichm – “For it was to save life that God sent me before you” (Genesis 45:5)**

As Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, he confronts head-on the probability that his brothers will be frightened of him. After all, they had thrown him into a pit and sold him into slavery – it would be only natural if he were still a little upset! But Joseph calms his brothers' fears.

In his commentary on this verse, Rashi notes that *l'michyah* in this case should be read *l'hiyot lachem l'michyah* – that Joseph was sent down in to Egypt specifically to save the lives of his brothers. Targum Yonatan points out that, two verses later, Torah tells us *u'l'hachayot lachem* (Genesis 45:7). Joseph did not go down to Egypt to save himself or to save the Egyptians but, rather, to save his brothers.

As Israeli pilots fly over Gaza, thousands of tanks and troops rush to the Gaza border and 6,500 Israeli reservists leave their families and jobs we are reminded of the sacrifice of Joseph; it is beyond a doubt that they go to save the lives of their brothers and sisters.

An estimated 500,000 Israelis are within range of Hamas' rocket arsenal. With assistance from Iran, according to Israeli security officials, Hamas has developed special rockets that can be broken down into small parts to make them easier to smuggle into Gaza. The rockets can easily be reassembled to launch attacks against Israel.

Even while fighting to save the lives of their brothers and sisters, the Israeli Defense Forces are taking steps to limit civilian casualties while facilitating humanitarian assistance to Gaza. Israel's actions have specifically targeted Hamas command centers, security installations, rocket-launching sites, weapons stockpiles and weapons smuggling tunnels. In order to limit civilian casualties Israel has transmitted specific warnings to Gazans within the immediate vicinity of an impending pinpoint strike allowing them to clear the area before a Hamas target is attacked.

Israel is working closely with the U.N., Red Cross, and World Health Organization to ensure the humanitarian assistance reaches Palestinian civilians in Gaza. On December 28 and 29, as Hamas continued to fire rockets into Israel, more than 140 truckloads of humanitarian supplies and 105,000 gallons of fuel were transferred to Gaza. Israel also continues to provide 70 percent of Gaza's electricity.

Israel's soldiers have gone down to Gaza and their mission is clear – like Joseph, they are there to save their brothers and sisters from the merciless onslaught of an intractable terrorist foe. As Americans, we must urgently reach out to our national leaders, explain the situation to them, and ask them to continue America's support for the Jewish state. ■