

NOVEMBER 22, 2010

Parashat Vayeishev

Peace from Direct Talks

And they could not speak peaceably to him (Genesis 37:4)

ולא יכלו דברו לשלום (בראשית לז:ד)

Why did Joseph's brothers not confront him directly about both his dreams and his inappropriate, haughty behavior toward them? Ohr Hachayyim (on 37:4) explains that initially they did want to confront Joseph directly. Yet, circumstances indicated that direct communication would serve no purpose: "Since Joseph spoke slanderously about them...and Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph over his brothers...and made for him a coat of colors, this tells us that they knew [about their father's preference] and he [Jacob] knew that they knew...There was no hope of fixing [the situation] and bringing peace. Since they could not confront him with direct rebuke...for this reason, 'they could not speak to him [to bring about] peace.'"

Because the leaders of the state of Israel, like Joseph's brothers, recognize that direct communication is the best method to achieve peace, the Jewish state is undertaking confidence building measures in the hopes of bringing the Palestinian Authority (PA) to the negotiating table.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accepted the goal of a demilitarized Palestinian state, implemented a 10-month moratorium on construction in the West Bank, and taken dramatic action to improve the day-to-day lives of Palestinians. Since 2008, Israel has lifted over 200 dirt roadblocks throughout the West Bank and 27 manned checkpoints, the [Jerusalem Post](#) reports. Yet, despite Israel's clear indication of her desire to negotiate a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, PA President Mahmoud Abbas abandoned recent negotiations, demanding that Israel meet additional preconditions before direct talks could resume. In addition, the PA has threatened to take unilateral actions such as seeking support for a Palestinian state at the United Nations. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed American opposition to such measures, stating that "We do not support unilateral steps by either party that would prejudice the outcome of such negotiations." For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Like Jacob's sons, who looked first to direct communication with Joseph to resolve their differences and bring peace, Israel has consistently demonstrated her commitment to direct negotiations as a means to achieve peace with the Palestinian people. Now, America must stand firmly beside Israel in opposition of unilateral actions that inhibit talks and stall the potential for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. ■

The Dry Pit

And the pit was empty, there was no water in it (Genesis 37:24)

והבור רק אין בו מים (בראשית לז:כד)

Commentators note the inherent redundancy of the phrase, "And the pit was empty, there was no water in it" (Genesis 37:24). If the pit was empty, one assumes that it also lacked water. What, then, does this second part of the phrase teach us? Rashi quotes the Talmudic interpretation (see Shabbat 22a) that while the pit did not hold any water, "it did contain snakes and scorpions," indicating Joseph's miraculous and divine salvation. Alternatively, Rabbeinu Bechaya (on 37:24) interprets the verse plainly, stating that if the well had simply been empty we still might have assumed that

it at least contained some water for Joseph to drink. Therefore, the text stresses that there was no water in it at all to show us that Joseph's brothers did not just leave him frightened, but at risk of dehydration as well.

The textual emphasis on the importance of water for survival reminds us of the water shortage that Israel faces today. With little rain so far this year, Israel must rely on her technological advances to ensure that the nation's growing water requirements will be met.

A recent [CNN International](#) report highlights the success of Israel's Shafdan Wastewater Treatment Plant in transforming wastewater into usable water suitable for agricultural needs. The Shafdan plant, one of the most complex wastewater treatment plants in Israel, and the entire the Middle East, treats 130 million cubic meters of wastewater annually. Secondary effluent, or treated water, from the Shafdan plant is used to infiltrate fields in the Israeli cities of Rishon Letzion and Yavne—where Israel's farmers grow oranges, carrots, potatoes, lettuce, wheat and flowers. This type of water also supplies roughly 70% of the agricultural water in the Negev region. Israel is by far the world's leader in water reclamation, treating and filtering 75% of its wastewater. By comparison, Spain reclaims 12%, Greece 5%, and the United States reclaims just 1% of its wastewater.

Because he only spent a short time in the pit, Joseph survived despite the utter lack of water. While Israel's water shortage is nowhere near that severe, the prospect of future water shortages has prompted the development of water preservation technologies which will play a critical role in preserving this important resource. ■

Questionable Leadership

And Judah went down from his brethren (Genesis 38:1)

וירד יהודה מאת אחיו (בראשית לה:א)

Chapter 38 of Genesis begins with the strange phrase: “And Judah went down from his brethren” (Genesis 38:1). What does this mean? Rashi (on 38:1) suggests that upon seeing their father's anguish in response to the disappearance of Joseph, the brothers began to question Judah's leadership. “They said, ‘You told us to sell him. Had you said to return him home we would have listened to you.’” Thus, the phrase indicates that the brothers blindly followed Judah, agreeing to sell Joseph to a band of traveling salesmen, yet when they witnessed the tragic and painful result they wondered whether Judah was really fit to lead them.

Reminiscent of Judah's brothers, who began to question his leadership when they saw the fallout from his poor choices, Iranian citizens—who are now feeling the sting of economic sanctions—have begun to publicly question the leadership of the Islamic Republic.

Recent signs have begun to indicate a growing rift between leaders of the Iranian regime amidst dramatic international economic sanctions aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program. According to the [Washington Post](#): “Sanctions ‘have really bitten much harder than [Iranian leaders] anticipated,’” said Defense Secretary Robert Gates. Gates went on to mention “indications that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is in trouble with the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. ‘We even have some evidence that Khamenei now is beginning to wonder if Ahmadinejad is lying to him about the impact of the sanctions on the economy and whether he's getting the straight scoop in terms of how much trouble the economy really is in,’ Gates said.” In addition, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has come under unprecedented criticism from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, the elite military force that oversees the country's nuclear program. A harshly worded article in the Guards' monthly magazine echoes criticism of Ahmadinejad from other parts of the Iranian establishment and shows that attempts to mend rifts within the Islamic Republic's ruling elite have yet to work. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Jacob's sons began to question Judah's leadership as soon as they saw the repercussions of their deeds. Similarly, Iranians, who are now seeing the painful impact of economic sanctions, are also beginning to wonder about the wisdom behind their government's policy decisions that are impacting their lives. ■