

DECEMBER 3, 2012

Parashat Vayeshev

Wishing for Tranquility

And Jacob dwelled (Genesis 37:1)

וישב יעקב (בראשית לז:א)

Following Jacob's return to the land of Canaan, he faced an endless list of struggles. Rashi (on 37:2), quoting the Midrash, notes that after the confrontations with both Esau and Laban and the painful episode with Dinah, Jacob wished for some peace and quiet. Commenting on the word *vayeshev* (and he dwelled), Rashi notes, "Jacob wished to dwell in tranquility. Immediately, the trouble surrounding Joseph leapt upon him. When the righteous wish to dwell in tranquility, the Holy One says, 'Is [the reward] set aside for the righteous in the world to come insufficient, that they wish to dwell in tranquility in this world as well?'"

Like Jacob who wished to dwell in tranquility but found himself surrounded by chaos, the state of Israel hopes for peace but instead finds itself bordered by hatred and animosity.

As of this writing the fragile ceasefire with Hamas holds, yet Israel is still forced to address myriad challenges from across the Middle East that threaten the country's security. To Israel's north, "Lebanese security forces discovered two Grad rockets that were aimed at Israel," [Yediot Achronot](#) reported. This served as a stark reminder of the arsenal of thousands of rockets that Hizballah has amassed along Israel's northern border. To Israel's east, the raging civil war in Syria represents a constant source of danger. According to [The Times of Israel](#), Syrian gunfire recently landed in Israeli territory twice in a single day. Also to Israel's east in Jordan, King Abdullah struggles to cope with rising discontent over the economic situation stalling political reforms that endanger the stability of Jordan. To Israel's south, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians protested Egyptian President Morsi's recent [edict](#) claiming expansive new powers as he stripped Egypt's courts of jurisdiction over his actions. The violent protests raised questions about the country's ability to ensure that the cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip continues to hold. Moreover, the Sinai border, which used to represent Israel's safest, most stable border region, is now a hotbed of terrorist activity where radical groups gather to arm and train. Each of these challenges reminds us of Israel's growing isolation in a very violent region, and the importance of continued strong American support. For more on Israel's neighbors, click [here](#).

The state of Israel has long yearned for peace and tranquility. Like our forefather Jacob, Israel has yet to dwell in tranquility, and instead struggles with challenge after challenge. ■

Failure to Communicate

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

ולא יכלו דברו לשלום (בראשית לז:ד)

The Torah relates that after Joseph described to his brothers his dreams of grandeur and domination over them, the brothers were "unable to speak to him in peace" (37:4). Netziv (see Ha'amek Davar on 37:4) notes that the brothers were unwilling to speak to him even in a peaceful manner because they assumed that "he hated them as well but concealed his hatred..." Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (on 37:4) adds that "They were unable to tolerate when he would speak to them in friendship; where there is camaraderie, no one minds anything; but where there is dissention, there is dispute over everything." Thus, the tragic sale of Joseph resulted directly from a failure to communicate.

Just as Joseph's brothers refused to communicate, the Palestinian Authority (PA) refuses direct talks with Israel opting instead for unilateral moves that make peace more difficult to achieve.

A direct blow was recently struck to Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passed a resolution granting the Palestinians non-member observer state status. However, an actual Palestinian state can only be achieved by direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, and UNGA recognition of a virtual state of Palestine does nothing to advance that process. What's worse, it actually hinders resumption of real peace talks. This point is underscored in PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas' indication that he will use this recognition to isolate Israel and attack her in international fora. As Abbas stated in a [New York Times](#) article last year, he views the U.N. not as a tool to end the conflict, but a vehicle to further attack Israel. "Palestine's admission to the United Nations would pave the way for the internationalization of the conflict as a legal matter, not only a political one," Abbas wrote. This intention was also evident in Abbas' hostile and antagonistic [speech](#) to the UNGA before the vote. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [called](#) the U.N. action "unfortunate and counterproductive," stating that "Only through direct negotiations between the parties can the Palestinians and Israelis achieve the peace they both deserve: Two states for two peoples, with a sovereign, viable and independent Palestine living side by side in peace and security with a Jewish and democratic Israel." For more on the Palestinian U.N. bid, click [here](#).

The brothers refused to speak with Joseph, exacerbating the arguments and bringing further discord to the family. In the same way, President Abbas' refusal to talk with Israel only pushes the prospect of peace further away. ■

The Root of the Problem

Know now whether it is your son's coat (Genesis 37:32)

הכר נא הכתנת בנך הוא (בראשית לז:לב)

After Jacob's sons returned home with Joseph's bloodied and ripped multicolored coat, they showed the coat to their father intimating that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. They asked, "Do you recognize whether this is the coat of your son or not" (37:32). Avnei Ezel (see Ma'ayn Shel Torah vol. 1 p. 168) explains that in their question the brothers conveyed a message to their father as well. In showing him the coat, they hinted to Jacob that the root cause of the entire episode that led to the sale of Joseph was the favoritism that Jacob showed towards Joseph.

Jacob's sons showed Joseph's coat to their father because they recognized the value of understanding the root cause of an issue. As such, the time has come for the world to recognize the root cause of many of the challenges that threaten stability in the Middle East: Iran.

Before the ink on the ceasefire agreement ending Operation Pillar of Defense even dried, Israeli intelligence satellites spied the loading of rockets and other material in Iran believed to be destined for the Gaza Strip, according to [The Jerusalem Post](#). A U.K.-based report claimed that Iran began preparing the weapon shipments around the same time Israel and Hamas negotiated a ceasefire. The shipment was said to include Iranian made Fajr-5 medium-range rockets, the same model that were used for the first time to target Tel Aviv and Jerusalem during Operation Pillar of Defense. Moreover, according to [Reuters](#), large billboards throughout the Gaza Strip read "Thank you Iran"—the first time there had been public acknowledgement of Iran's role in arming Islamic terrorists in Gaza. U.S. representatives have recently stressed Iran's underlying role in the Middle East. Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) singled out Iran as a major source of instability in the Middle East, [Politico](#) reported. "Iran's support of Hamas, Hizballah, Syria, and the way that has then been filtered into weaponry that goes through Egypt, into Gaza... That's the source of the problem." Senator John McCain (R-AZ) expressed a similar sentiment. "The centrifuges continue to spin in Tehran," warned McCain, "The Iranians will continue unless they see that there is a price to pay.... It's time that we recognized that it isn't just nuclear weapons the Iranians are doing." For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Just as Avnei Ezel considered the root cause of Jacob's sons' actions, the international community must also consider Iran's underlying role in the Middle East and the radical groups the Islamic Republic supports. ■

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