

DECEMBER 17, 2012

Parashat Vayigash

The Direct Approach

And Judah approached (Genesis 44:18)

ויגש אליו יהודה (בראשית מא:לג)

Why does the Torah explicitly state that Judah approached Joseph before speaking with him? Why Judah was the only brother to stand up for Benjamin? The Sages in the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 93) answer both questions with a verse from Job: “‘One is so near to another that no air can come between them’ (Job 41:8)—‘One is so near to another’—this refers to Judah [who approached Joseph]; ‘that no air can come between them’—this refers to the brothers, who said to each other, the kings are dealing with each-other...Let a king deal with a king.” In other words, the brothers did not interfere because they recognized that Judah’s direct approach would negotiate Benjamin’s release.

The brothers realized that reaching an agreement with Joseph required direct negotiation between the parties. In order for the Palestinians Authority to reach a peace agreement with Israel, it must follow the same approach.

The U.N. General Assembly recently passed a resolution that granted the Palestinians non-member observer state status. This action represented a direct blow to Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts. After the vote, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton heavily [criticized](#) the move, calling it an “unfortunate and counterproductive resolution,” noting that, “it places further obstacles in the path to peace. We have been clear that only through direct negotiations between the parties can the Palestinians and Israelis achieve the peace that both deserve: two states for two people.” Israeli Ambassador to the U.N. Ron Prosor [reiterated](#) Israel’s offer to resume direct negotiations with the Palestinians immediately. “Israel has always extended its hand for peace and will always extend its hand for peace...Time and again, we have sought peace with the Palestinians. Time and again, we have been met by rejection of our offers, denial of our rights, and terrorism targeting our citizens,” Prosor said. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Judah successfully negotiated Benjamin’s release when he approached Joseph directly. The Palestinians must recognize the wisdom of Judah’s approach and return to the negotiating table. ■

A Disturbing Double Standard

For you are like Pharaoh (Genesis 44:18)

כי כמוך כפרעה (בראשית מד:יה)

According to the Torah, Judah asked Joseph that his “anger not burn” (44:18). Rashi (on 44:18) infers from this that Judah spoke harshly to his brother. According to Chizkuni (on 44:18) Judah accused Joseph of duplicity for failing to follow the laws of the land, telling Joseph, “It is written in the laws of Egypt that a slave cannot rule nor wear the garments of ministers...and yet the Pharaoh dressed you, [a former slave] in these garments—so he clearly does not keep his promises, and they are simply idle speech. You are similar, for Pharaoh decreed that those who came [to Egypt] to purchase food would arrive and depart in peace. Here we see another promise that is not fulfilled.”

Judah criticized Joseph for duplicitously applying the law when it suited him and ignoring it when it did not. The European Union displays a similar double standard, when it criticizes Israel while ignoring the hateful rhetoric spewed by Hamas.

After Israel announced plans to proceed with the development of the E1 corridor between Jerusalem and Ma'aleh Adumim, governments across Europe responded swiftly and harshly, summoning Israeli diplomats to express their displeasure with the move, and then issuing a statement deeply critical of the Jewish state, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. During the same period the European Union remained silent as Hamas reiterated its refusal to accept the existence of Israel during its 25th anniversary celebration. Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal told the tens of thousands attending the celebration that "Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north. There will be no concession on an inch of the land... We will never recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation and therefore there is no legitimacy for Israel, no matter how long it will take." According to [The Times of Israel](#), The E.U. only denounced the statements after Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu contrasted Europe's condemnations of Israel with its lack of response to Mashaal's speech. "This weekend, the leaders of Hamas openly called for the destruction of Israel. Where was the outrage? Where were the U.N. resolutions? Where was President Abbas?... We cannot accept that when Jews build homes in their ancient capital of Jerusalem, the international community has no problem finding its voice, but when Palestinian leaders openly call for the destruction of Israel... the world is silent," said Netanyahu.

Judah rightly criticized Joseph for acting duplicitously. Regardless of our personal views about the E1 issue, we must not allow calls for the destruction of Israel to go unchallenged. ■

Following Existing Laws

Your servants have been keepers of cattle (Genesis 46:34)

אנשי מקנה היו עבדיך (בראשית מו:לד)

As Joseph brought his family to Egypt, he considered how they would maintain their unique identities and avoid assimilating into Egyptian society. Joseph told his brothers to inform the king that they were shepherds "that you may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians" (46:34). Kli Yakkar (on 46:32) explains that "the essence of this matter was in order that Pharaoh distanced them from upon him and settled [the family] in the Land of Goshen." Therefore, in order to convince the Pharaoh to separate his brothers from the rest of Egypt, he simply encouraged the king to enforce an already existing law.

Joseph pressed Pharaoh to enforce an existing law in order to help his family. Today, the United States must also enforce the already existing laws that will prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear weapons capability.

On a daily basis, Iran feels the harsh impact of sanctions enacted by the United States and its allies. As a result of intensifying economic pressure Iran faces a drop in oil exports, skyrocketing inflation, rising unemployment and significant damage to the value of its currency. However, Iran has yet to suspend its nuclear program. Iran continues to press forward with its nuclear weapons research, and the time needed to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear weapons capability is quickly expiring. While Congress considers imposing additional sanctions on Iran, the United States and its international partners must also immediately and dramatically step up enforcement of already imposed sanctions. The U.S. must work with nations still buying Iranian oil to ensure they continue to significantly reduce purchases, and nations that fail to do so must face consequences. In addition, foreign entities that continue to do business and provide support to the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) must be sanctioned, as well as shipping companies that continue to call at ports controlled by the IRGC, and financial institutions that continue to conduct significant financial transactions with or provide significant financial services to the Central Bank of Iran. Along with additional sanctions, enforcing the sanctions already signed into law will further tighten the pressure on Iran to abandon its reckless nuclear weapons program. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Like Joseph, who used existing Egyptian law to achieve his political goals, the United States must fully enforce already existing law if it hopes to convince Iran to change its ways and stop its dangerous nuclear enrichment. ■

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