

JANUARY 7, 2013

Parashat Vaera

Compelled to Negotiate

And Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron (Exodus 8:21) ויקרא פרעה אל משה ולאהרן (שמות ח:כא)

According to the text, Pharaoh did not respond to some of the plagues while reaching out to Moses and attempting to negotiate in response to others. Why did the king of Egypt contact Moses following the swarms of flies, but not following the plagues of blood, lice, pestilence or boils? The Sages explain that “Any suffering that was able to endure—he endured” (Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer 19). It was only when the suffering became overwhelming that Pharaoh felt compelled to contact Moses and make a concession towards releasing the Jewish people.

Pharaoh only negotiated with Moses when Egypt’s suffering became too great to endure. Similarly, the economic sanctions strangling the Iranian economy may also push Iran to seriously negotiate with the United States.

The Iranian government is slowly edging closer to revising its hard line positions and entering into real negotiations regarding its nuclear program, according to a senior official who is in charge of U.S. economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic, [The Times of Israel](#) reported. U.S. Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence David Cohen said that, economically, 2012 was one of the most difficult years for Iran since the 1979 revolution, noting that the country’s oil exports had decreased by 50 percent. Cohen said that over the past year, and especially in recent weeks, there have been signs that Iran is interested in finding a solution through negotiations. [Reuters](#) recently reported that Iran hopes talks with six major powers about its nuclear program will begin very soon. “We gave our proposal to Russia and they expressed their readiness for a restart of the talks. We welcome them,” Saeed Jalili, Iran’s National Security Council secretary, said. “The venue and the time...have not been finalized but we hope that these talks will start very soon,” he told reporters. The six powers so far have failed to achieve a breakthrough in three rounds of talks with Iran since April of last year. While U.S. pressure on the Islamic Republic to return to talks has been a great influence, the window for negotiations will not remain open for long. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Just as the suffering of Egypt pressed Pharaoh to negotiate with Moses to free the Children of Israel, the crushing economic pressure on Iran may well be having the desired effect of convincing Iran to halt its illegal and dangerous nuclear weapons program. ■

Acts of Compassion

And he entreated the Lord (Exodus 8:26) ויעתר אל ה' (שמות ח:כו)

When Pharaoh finally buckled under the pressure of the plague of swarming flies and offered to permit the Israelites to go and worship in the desert, he asked Moses to pray on his behalf to remove the plague. Moses agreed and succeeded in ending the plague. Yet, Moses didn’t simply just pray for Pharaoh. Rather, he “entreated the Lord” on Pharaoh’s behalf. Rashi (on 8:26) explains that Moses didn’t pray in a normal fashion. “He exerted himself in prayer...and he prayed a great deal” to remove the plague. While the Jewish people prayed for relief from their suffering at the hands of the Egyptians, their leader, Moses, was praying for the relief of their oppressors!

Moses demonstrated that care and concern for all mankind is one of our people's greatest traits. Today, the state of Israel follows in Moses' footsteps by addressing the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza.

For the first time in five years, Israel allowed 20 truckloads of building materials into Gaza for use by the private sector, [The New York Times](#) reported. One of the first tangible concessions under a ceasefire deal reached after eight days of intensive fighting in November, it signaled a shift in Israel's approach to the Palestinian enclave. Israeli officials said that construction materials would now be allowed in on a daily basis, in return for Egyptian help in preventing the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. The shipment came in addition to 34 trucks of gravel that recently crossed into Gaza from Egypt, which also had Israel's approval. The materials from Egypt were earmarked for construction projects that the emir of Qatar pledged to pay for when he visited Gaza in October. Even during Operation Pillar of Defense, when terrorists in Gaza were firing hundreds of rockets and mortars at civilian targets, Israel continued to provide goods and utilities to the Gazan public. Representatives from Israel's Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) worked with the IDF, other branches of the Israeli defense establishment, international organizations and governmental representatives in order to [provide assistance for the needs of the civilian population in Gaza](#), providing electricity, water, and the passage of goods into Gaza, ensuring that food stores in Gaza remained stocked throughout the operation.

Even as the people of Egypt oppressed the Jewish nation, Moses still exerted himself in prayer on their behalf. Today, the state of Israel emulates Moses' compassion, working to provide basic needs for the civilian population of Gaza. ■

Accuracy to Protect

And the Lord shall make a division (Exodus 9:4)

והפלה ה' (שמות ט:ד)

The plagues are traditionally described as miraculously only targeting the Egyptian populations while leaving the Israelites unaffected. For example, Moses warned Pharaoh that the plague of pestilence would “make a division between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt; and nothing shall die of all that belongs to the children of Israel...” (9:4). The Egyptian king even checked and confirmed that “there was not so much as one of the cattle of the Israelites dead” (9:7). According to the Midrash, “Even if an [Israelite] animal was in the possession of an Egyptian...it was saved” (Shemot Rabbah 11:5).

Just as the plagues caused devastating damage to the Egyptians but left the Israelites unscathed, Israel employs advanced technology and tactics to target terrorists while protecting innocent civilians.

Through cutting edge drone technology, careful planning and ongoing efforts to warn civilians of upcoming strikes the Israel Defense Force managed to protect the very lives that Hamas endangered during the recent Operation Pillar of Defense. [Fox News](#) reported that Israel fired over 1,500 missiles into Gaza and still minimized civilian casualties. “Drones (UAVs – Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), play a very important and essential role in the protection of the state of Israel,” Major G, the chief instructing officer of the Israeli UAV School explained. “The great advantage of the drone is the ability to stay in the air for up to 40 hours at a time...I am able to stay above and investigate the target for a long time, [and] clear it of uninvolved civilians...” In addition, before targeting a building Israel actually warns any inhabitants to leave. A drone operator sitting somewhere in Israel can clear a target on the ground in Gaza of innocent civilians. “In a lot of cases we have regular houses where in the basement there is a lot of ammunition, bombs and missiles...In cases where there are people inside a house or building we never strike the target without prior warning. We make phone calls, send leaflet flier warnings, and sometimes use a technique called ‘[Knock On the Roof](#).’”

The plagues punished the Egyptians while avoiding the innocent Israelite slaves in their midst. Today, the IDF attempts to do the same, attacking terrorists that threaten Israel while making every effort to protect the innocent civilians deliberately placed in harm's way. ■