

DECEMBER 9, 2013

## Parashat Vayechi

### A Gathering of Nations

**And to him shall be a gather of the nations (Genesis 48:10)**

**ולו יקחת עמים (בראשית מז:י)**

In his blessing to Judah, Jacob placed the future monarchy of the Jewish nation upon Judah (King David, and the subsequent Davidic monarchy stemmed from the tribe of Judah). Jacob added that when the time of redemption arrives, then *velo yikhat amim*. What is the meaning of this unusual phrase? Rashi explains the phrase to mean that the king will have a “gathering of the nations,” as the nations of the world turn to Israel for its wisdom and guidance. This would demonstrate the critical role of the nation of Israel within the international community.

Jacob blessed Judah that one day he would gather the nations of the world together. This month, Israel took a tiny step in that direction, finally gaining membership to an advisory committee in the U.N. Human Rights Council.

For years, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) issued a stream of condemnations against Israel and insisted that human rights violations in Israel remain a permanent agenda item to be address at UNHRC meetings. Israel remained singled out as the only nation excluded from a working group advisory board to the council. This eventually led to Israel’s refusal to participate in council proceedings, and its threatened refusal to subject itself to the council’s Universal Periodic Human Rights Review process. Earlier this year, Israel returned to the council with the commitment that it would finally be admitted to a working group. At the beginning of the month, Israel was admitted into the Western Europe and Others Group in Geneva (WEOG), “a move which will provide it with some influence before the U.N. top human rights body,” [The Times of Israel](#) reported. Secretary of State John Kerry called the move “overdue.” Kerry stated, “It goes without saying that at a time when the scourge of global anti-Semitism is on the rise, it is more important than ever for Israel to have a strong voice that can be heard everywhere. This is a particularly welcome development as we work to end anti-Israel bias in the U.N. system.” The exclusion of Israel from a regional working group in Geneva was a profound affront to decency and justice which the United States has sought to correct for many years. Israel’s ability to join WEOG marks an important step toward normalizing Israel’s status at the U.N. and a setback to those who seek to isolate the Jewish state. Israel’s mission to the United Nations [thanked](#) U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power for her efforts to right this wrong and stand on the front lines to admit Israel into WEOG. For more on Israel and the U.N., click [here](#).

According to Rashi, the nations of the world will one day gather together under Judah’s auspices. Recently, Israel took a tiny step towards greater right of participation in the body that represents the nations of the world. ■

### Making a Choice

**[He] crossed his hands (Genesis 48:14)**

**שכל את ידיו (בראשית מז:יד)**

When blessing his grandchildren Ephraim and Menashe, Jacob blessed not the elder grandson, but both of them at the same time. Moreover, he crossed his arms, giving the younger (Ephraim) the more prominent position over his older brother. In addition, rather than blessing one preferred son, he offered blessings to each of his sons. Why did Jacob’s blessings depart from those of his ancestors in such a prominent manner? Michal Dicker suggests that Jacob decided to “undermine the value of fixed and ‘unmerited’ qualities, such as age and...first-born rights...Jacob communicated

that action, rather than status, gauges a person's worth...It is initiative, rather than an inherited (genetic) position, that can ultimately change the course of one's own life, or the lives of one's children."

Jacob taught his children that the choices they made would ultimately determine their future. Today, the people of Gaza suffer not due to outside aggression, but because of the choices made by Hamas' leadership.

Recently, a number of media outlets have highlighted the tragic situation in Gaza, during which interruptions in electric service has led to raw sewage flooding the streets. Yet, while Palestinian sympathizers continue to blame Israel for the crisis, Israel has been stymied in its efforts to avoid the crisis, by none other than the Hamas leadership. While Hamas used to rely on cheap fuel imported through smuggling tunnels in Gaza, the Egyptian government has clamped down on the smuggling and closed the tunnels. Israel stands ready to sell fuel to Hamas to power the water treatment and electric plants in Gaza, yet Hamas refuses to pay the fuel taxes demanded not by Israel, but by the Palestinian Authority. Despite this reality, [The New York Times](#) quoted Omar al-Khouli, a Palestinian baker living in Gaza who said, "I blame Israel, the Ramallah government and Hamas for the crisis." Asked about the crisis in Gaza, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon [said](#) that Israel is the only party that supplies Gaza with most of its electricity and water, and allows in goods daily through the Kerem Hashalom crossing, with the exception of concrete and dual-use products that can be used to manufacture rockets and missiles. Ya'alon added that Hamas could have "decided to grow and export strawberries and not produce and export rockets and missiles." For more on Hamas, click [here](#).

Jacob taught his children that their own choices would determine their future. The world must understand that the people of Gaza's suffering stems from their leadership's preference to parade the suffering of its people rather than seek peaceful solutions that improve the lives of its citizens. ■

## Helping a Neighbor

**I will sustain you (Genesis 50:21)**

**אנכי אכלכל אתכם (בראשית נ:כא)**

After Joseph returned with his brothers from the burial of Jacob in the Machpelah Cave, the brothers, fearing that Joseph would exact vengeance upon them for their actions, pleaded for his mercy. Joseph eased their fear, telling them, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God...I will sustain you and your little ones" (50:19, 50:21). Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg writes that according to S'forno (on 50:19), Joseph did not absolve the brothers of their sin. Rather, he insisted that it was not his place to punish his brothers for their behavior. Only God could judge them for the sale of Joseph—and it remained his obligation and moral responsibility to care for their well-being and survival.

Although Joseph did not forgive the brothers, he cared for them nonetheless. The state of Israel follows Joseph's example; even with sporadic attacks from the Syrian border, Israel continues to provide Syrians with assistance.

During the same week that [Syrian gunmen opened fire](#) at an IDF position in the Golan Heights provoking the Israel Defense Forces to return fire, and a Syrian mortar shell exploded in Israel near the Druse village of Majdal Shams, and IDF soldiers have been providing humanitarian assistance for residents of Syrian villages close to the Israeli border, [Haaretz](#) reported. "According to [Israeli Defense Minister Moshe] Ya'alon, Israel has sent water and food, including baby foods, across the border, and has been helping the Syrians prepare for winter. 'Given the fact that these villages are besieged and have no access to anyplace else, we are helping for humanitarian reasons,' the defense minister said." While the food is usually transferred to the Syrian villages via the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, sometimes, IDF soldiers lay aid packages just across the border and the village residents collect them. [The Washington Post](#) reported that shipments have been going on for several months, and that the Israelis have not tried to hide the origin of the goods. Some items, including medicine and diapers, are made in Israel and have Hebrew writing on them. "We can't sit by and watch the humanitarian difficulties on the other side," Yaalon said.

According to S'forno, it remained Joseph's obligation and moral responsibility to care for his brothers' well-being and survival. Regardless of Israel's relationship with Syria, Israel continues to provide assistance to suffering Syrians. ■

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