



Sermon Tidbits

DECEMBER 22, 2014

Parashat Vayigash

Making an Emotional Connection

Then Judah came near to him (Genesis 44:18)

ויגש אליו יהודה (בראשית מז:יח)

"It's frightening. Frightening. Just so there isn't any misunderstanding," said Yossi Bornstein, of Kibbutz Ein Hashloshah. "Yes, yes, you're allowed to say it. Everyone who lives here is afraid, and anyone who says otherwise is a liar." When asked how it seems so quiet in the rural, scenic kibbutz Bornstein answered, "There is no quiet. What quiet is there here? Under us it's burning. Fifteen meters [fifty feet] below us it's burning." Kibbutz Ein Hashlosha sits three kilometers (about two miles) from the Gaza border. This past summer IDF soldiers discovered a two kilometer tunnel dug by Hamas terrorists that burrowed under the border fence and exited the ground two kilometers—a little more than a mile—from the kibbutz. Pablo Lefler, a kibbutz farmer said that, "The great fear from these tunnels is that a team of trained terrorists is in the kibbutz in ten minutes, and could do something 'quite serious.'" Orly Biar, a thirty years resident of the kibbutz asks, "How do you explain [to the children] that it's not a Kassam rocket, but that [the danger] can come from the ground? From one perspective, it's a good thing. Great, we found the tunnel, and we're happy about that. But there are a hundred more like it. So do me a favor, and find the hundred, so that I can have peace at night, and finally sleep in peace." (Watch the interview in Hebrew [here](#).)

Marketers know that a critical component to success lies in the ability to create an emotional connection with a product or an idea. Some claim that as much as fifty percent of every buying decision is driven by emotion. People who love their phones or sneakers don't love them because they work properly. They take that for granted. Rather, they love the product because of the way that it makes them feel different and better. This concept of marketing through emotion isn't new. In fact, it was used by Judah to convince Joseph to release Benjamin from captivity.

When Joseph discovers his "stolen" goblet in Benjamin's sack, he decrees that Benjamin must remain in Egypt as a slave while the rest of the brothers are free to go. Judah must now negotiate for Benjamin's freedom. Ultimately, his words move Joseph so greatly that he breaks down and reveals his true identity to them. How does he do it? First, Judah approached Joseph—literally closing the physical gap between them. Targum Onkelos translates the word *vayigash* to mean "and he came close." Judah wanted Joseph to see him not as a distant abstraction, but as a person with needs and fears. More importantly, Judah explained his personal connection to Benjamin, and the commitment he had made to their father to safely return Benjamin home. Commenting on the verse, "For your servant became surety for the lad to my father," (verse 32) Rashi explains that Judah told Joseph, "If you're wondering why I am arguing more than the rest of my brothers...I tied myself [to Benjamin] with a strong tie, committing myself to excommunication both in this world and the next [should I fail to return with him]." In other words, Judah created an emotional connection with Joseph, telling his brother, "This is important to me. I made a personal commitment, and I cannot let my father down." When Joseph heard these words, he broke down, and revealed himself to his brothers.

If we want to convince others about the issues we care about deeply, facts and figures aren't enough. We need to create personal and emotional connections in order to allow them to understand our passion and conviction. This week, many of us read about [Hamas' recent parade](#) celebrating the group's 27th anniversary, which featured a display of weapons, including R-160 rockets which were fired as far as Haifa this past summer. The parade also included naval commandos in full battle gear, and the launch of a Kassam rockets into the sea and a drone, which forced Israel to scramble fighter jets in response. Yet, while we know the facts, the danger still seems distant. It's far away, over

there. To convey the true danger Hamas poses to Israel, we need to create an emotional connection. We must remind our friends and acquaintances about Pablo Lefler, who cannot plant his crops for fear of being shot at by a Hamas sniper, and Orly Biar who simply wants to sleep in peace. How far is a mile from us, as we sit safely in the synagogue today? Could any of us truly feel secure if we knew that terrorists, armed with the will and weapons to kill us, were burrowing towards us right now?

The strongest argument in support of Israel must include the element of emotion. Judah recognized that emotion has the power to change minds. We must use that power to give Israel the means to continue to protect its citizens. ■

Calling Out Hypocrisy

I am Joseph, does my father still live? (Genesis 45:3)

אני יוסף העוֹד אבי חי (בראשית מה: ג)

Alan Dershowitz once said that “Hypocrisy is not a way of getting back to the moral high ground. Pretending you're moral, saying your moral is not the same as acting morally.” Nowhere is this more accurate today than in the Geneva Conventions, which claims a moral high ground purporting to speak out on behalf of human rights, while simultaneously taking actions that diametrically oppose human rights. On Dec. 17, the U.S. and Israel, along with Canada and Australia, stood together to denounce a meeting of the Conference of High Contracting Parties at the Fourth Geneva Convention. Prior meetings have devolved into political attacks against Israel. The one-day meeting was called to discuss Israel’s alleged non-compliance with the Fourth Geneva Convention in the West Bank and Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke out against the convention stating, “Today we witnessed staggering examples of European hypocrisy. In Geneva, they call for the investigation of Israel for war crimes, while in Luxemburg the European court removed Hamas from the list of terrorist organizations,” reports [I24news](#).

Joseph gave his brothers a very similar type of rebuke, castigating them for hypocritically claiming to care about their father’s well-being after having silently allowed him to suffer for years. Commenting on the phrase, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” (verse 3) the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 93:10) notes: “Woe is to us from the day of judgment; woe is to us from the day of rebuke. For when Joseph, the youngest of the tribes, rebuked his brothers, they could not answer him because they were ‘frightened by his presence’...” Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik of Brisk (1820-1892), in his classic work *Beit Halevi* (p. 46) wonders where Joseph rebukes his brothers. In fact, he seems to comfort and console them (see verse 5). Why does the Midrash say that Joseph rebuked his brothers? *Beit Halevi* explains that Joseph’s question “Is my father still alive” is not a question at all, but rather a strongly worded rebuke to his brothers. Before Joseph reveals himself, Judah gives an impassioned speech begging for the return of Benjamin. He tells Joseph, “For how shall I go up to my father, if the lad be not with me? Lest I look upon the evil that shall come on my father.” (44:34) According to *Beit Helevi*, when Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers and asks them, “Is my father still alive?” he essentially says, “I don’t understand how my father could have lived to this point from the great pain and anguish he has suffered.” In asking about their father, Joseph points out the brothers’ hypocrisy and wonders, “If you cared so greatly about our father’s pain, how did you sell me into slavery?”

The hypocrite—“one who speaks with his mouth one way and in his heart another way”—is one of the three types of people that are hated by the Holy One. (Pesachim 113) Understanding this, the United States rightfully articulated its opposition to the hypocritical assembly, saying, “The United States does not support and will not attend the December 17 meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, which we believe risks politicizing the Geneva Conventions. We reaffirm the importance placed by the United States on the Geneva Conventions and on avoiding actions which could undermine respect for them.”

Being called out as a hypocrite is painful, as Joseph’s brothers learned. But looking the other way only encourages those who malign Israel while ignoring countries who blatantly violate human rights. ■

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