

DECEMBER 19, 2016

Parashat Vayeshev

Refusing to Speak

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

ולא יכלו דברו לשלם (בראשית לז:ד)

In a recent [interview with Leslie Stahl on 60 Minutes](#), Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated his longstanding commitment to a two-state solution for peace with the Palestinians. “I haven’t reversed my position. I’ve said, ‘Look, we will solve this because we want two nation states at peace and with the proper security arrangements... Two states for two peoples. And that’s where I’m focused. Yeah, I’d like to have President Trump, when he gets into the White House, help me work on that. I’d like to see if the Arab states can help me achieve that. It’s a new reality. A new possibility.’” It would be a new reality and a new possibility, that is, if the Palestinians would agree to negotiate directly with Israel. Instead, they have consistently turned to outside parties, such as the [United Nations](#) and [France](#), to impose an agreement framework on the Jewish state. Critically, their unwillingness to speak directly with Israel impedes on the possibility of peace, similarly Joseph’s brothers demonstrate in Parashat Vayeshev that a willingness to speak frankly and directly is the first prerequisite for peace and coexistence.

The opening section of Vayeshev outlines the enmity that developed between Joseph and his brothers, stemming from the favoritism that Jacob displays for young Joseph over his other sons. Witnessing this favoritism, the brothers reacted harshly. “When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.” (37:4) Rashi explains that this teaches us that their hatred caused them to refuse to speak with Joseph at all. Eighteenth-century sage Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshitz of Prague derives an important insight into the causes of dispute and discord, by understanding the verse in a novel manner. Rabi Eibeshitz notes that the brothers’ refusal to speak with Joseph actually increased and inflamed their hatred towards him. “Had they spoken with him, perhaps they would have achieved peace. This is the essence of every dispute, that the [disputing parties] never enter into dialogue, for neither one wishes to listen to the other and understand him...” Joseph’s brothers’ refusal to even speak with him not only demonstrated their hatred for him, but it also caused their enmity to grow and prevented the possibility of reconciliation and peace.

Like Joseph’s brothers, whose refusal to speak with him negated the possibility of achieving a resolution to their dispute, the Palestinian Authority’s similar refusal to enter face-to-face negotiations with Israel without preconditions represents the primary obstacle towards peace between the two parties. The most recent round of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks began in July 2013, but the Palestinian Authority (PA) pulled out of the talks in the spring of 2014. Since then, the PA has attempted to realize its objectives outside of negotiations by asking the United Nations and other international bodies to impose Palestinian terms on Israel. These efforts undermine the chance for Israeli-Palestinian peace. To further peace, the United States should maintain its commitment to the principles that guided previous successful negotiations. Talks must be direct and bilateral, and both sides must be willing to make key compromises. Outside parties must not attempt to impose a solution on the parties, and all disagreements should be resolved privately. In other words, Israelis and Palestinians must sit down together at the negotiating table and talk to each-other. Israel has expressed both in words and deeds a longstanding willingness to do just that. Until the Palestinians demonstrate a similar readiness to truly negotiate in good faith, there is no real possibility for peace. ■

Dreamers

And Joseph dreamt a dream (Genesis 37:5)

ויחלם יוסף חלום (בראשית לז:ה)

Earlier this month, [Microsoft quietly announced](#) that it had contracted with an Israeli real estate company to develop a new technology campus in Herzliya. According to Globes, “Microsoft Israel will rent 45,000 square meters of office space over 15 years at a cost of over 1 billion shekels.” This represents a major expansion of the software giant’s imprint in the Jewish state. Last week [Ha’aretz reported that](#), “Jeff Bezos, the founder and CEO of the internet giant Amazon, secretly visited Israel recently as his company moves forward with plans to greatly expand its presence in Israel...Within two years the company expects to have 800 people working at the new Haifa facility.” Items like these seem to appear every week, as we watch Israel continue to grow both economically and technologically. Moreover, this growth has had a profound impact on Israel’s status around the world. Last week, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu made a [historic state visit to the Central Asian states of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan](#), the first time a sitting Israeli Prime Minister officially visited the two Muslim countries. While Netanyahu focused on the importance of a strong relationship between Jewish and Muslim countries, his visit highlighted the power of Israel’s technological expertise, which is increasingly sought by nations around the world.

How did Israel grow from its humble beginnings less than seventy years ago to become a growing player around the world? First and foremost we must acknowledge the hand of Providence, which has guided and protected the people of Israel since the birth of the Jewish state. In addition, it has taken a great deal of hard work and much suffering. But it all began with the spirit of Joseph and his sense of the possible. Without a doubt, the flowering of Israel we witness today began with powerful dreams, combined with a desire and a will to turn those dreams into reality.

We all know of Joseph as a dreamer. Tasked with tending the sheep in the field, Joseph had plenty of time to dream. Joseph’s brothers referred to him as the “*Ba’al Chalomot*”—“the Master of Dreams,” (37:19) and the power of the dreams made them feel threatened by not only their father’s favoritism, but by the dreams themselves. According to Ramban, Joseph recognized the dreams not simply as predictions of the future or delusions of grandeur, but Joseph viewed them as visions which must guide his actions as he worked to actualize them. Many commentators wonder why, later in life, after Joseph achieved power and prominence as the Prince of Egypt, did Joseph not simply contact his father and inform him that he was alive? Ramban (on Genesis 42:9) explains that Joseph did not contact his family because he understood the need to actualize his dreams. “Everything he did in the proper time in order to fulfill his dreams, for he knew that they would in truth come to happen.” According to Ramban, Joseph understood that we must work to realize our dreams if we want them to become reality. Despite his brothers’ outright rejection of his lofty goals and their strenuous efforts to thwart him, Joseph’s faith in his dreams propel him to greatness. Rabbi Berel Wein [describes Joseph](#) as “the quintessential dreamer, his head in the stars and his youthful exuberance and certainty in the truthful outcome of his dreams...Someone without dreams and ambition, who refuses to reach heavenward and conquer the stars, will never be a truly creative or original person.”

Chemi Peres, son of the late Shimon Peres, serves as the chairman of the Peres Center in Jaffa, which Shimon Peres founded in the 1990s to advance his vision of Israeli-Palestinian peace. During a recent visit to Washington for the General Assembly of the Jewish Federations of North America, Peres [told the auditorium of Jewish leaders and activists](#), “My father used to say, ‘Israel exceeded all of our dreams. Looking back, I only regret that our dreams were not greater.’ He told us about Israel of the early days. There were swamps in the north and deserts in the south. We had two lakes, one dead and the other dying. And in between them ran the Jordan river, with more fame than water. A holy country surrounded by oily countries. We had only one unique resource: our people.” Israel’s story was, “the story of a dream come true, realized by a people who built their future with their own hands.” The dreams of Joseph made the Jewish state possible and spurred its founders and builders to establish the state of Israel that we have today.

What about the next seventy years? What are our dreams for Israel’s future? Only with a new set of ambitions and outlandish dreams will we be able to build on our successes now and long into the future. ■