

DECEMBER 4, 2017

Parashat Vayeshev

The Silence of Hatred

And [they] could not speak peaceably to him (Genesis 37:4) ולא יכלו דברו לשלום (בראשית לז:ד)

A seemingly innocuous article in [The New York Times](#) last week reported on a wrestling match that did not in fact take place. At the U23 World Senior Wrestling Championship in Poland late last month, 23-year-old Iranian wrestler Alireza Karimi-Machiani was, “cruising through the match, looking like a sure bet to defeat his Russian opponent. But suddenly, as if suffering an injury, he fell to the mat and was thrown around the ring like a rag doll by the surprised Russian. Finally, the match ended and the referee pronounced the Russian the winner.” He wasn’t injured. “I was told that the Israeli wrestler defeated his American rival, and that I must lose to avoid facing an Israeli opponent,” Mr. Karimi-Machiani told reporters. However, this story is about more than one athlete throwing a match. Iran’s refusal to allow its citizens to engage with Israelis in the sports arena demonstrates a level of malice that must concern and distress us, because it represents a hatred that may ultimately lead to violence—which is exactly what happened to Joseph in our parashah.

“When his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him.” (37:4) Should we be surprised at how Joseph’s brothers treat him? How many of us would react differently were our parents to openly favor one of our siblings? Joseph adds flame to the fire by sharing his dreams of grandeur and domination over his brothers, and they unsurprisingly respond with malice: “And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it to his brethren; and they hated him yet the more.” (37:5) Only once does the text describe the degree to which they hated him. The brothers, we read, “could not speak peaceably to him.” (verse 4) What does this phrase mean? Rabbi Shlomo Hakohen of Leszno offers an explanation. “In my opinion we can explain that Joseph’s brothers could not abide suffering through listening to the words of Joseph even when he spoke peaceably with them.” In other words, the brothers hated Joseph so much that they couldn’t stand speaking with him at all. They cut off all contact, further demonizing Joseph to the point that the kidnapping and murder of their brother became, in their minds, a viable and practical option.

The great Israeli military leader Moshe Dayan [once said that](#), “If you want to make peace, you don’t talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.” While we appreciate the truth in Dayan’s statement, the inverse is equally true: If you won’t talk to your enemies you make it abundantly clear that you don’t want to make peace. While the world might shrug off the calls of Iran’s leadership to wipe Israel from the map as hyperbolic rhetoric, the enforced estrangement of Iranians from any possible contact with Israel underscores the true level of malice Iran has for the people and state of Israel. Not only through its words, but more importantly through its actions, Iran has demonstrated clearly that it not only has no interest in peace with Israel, but instead truly yearns to destroy the Jewish state.

After Karimi-Machiani’s forfeit drew outrage from Iranians on social media, Iranian Shiite Muslim cleric Javad Jalali defended the decision on Twitter saying that, “we will not step onto the mat against Israel until the army of Islam triumphantly steps onto the Holy Land of Palestine.” The world cannot afford to harbor false illusions about the Iranian leadership and any possible desire for peace in the Middle East. A nation that [“celebrates”](#) when its athlete forfeits rather than wrestle with an Israeli is a people that, “cannot speak peaceably” and a threat that the world must address. As Iran significantly increases its presence in war-torn Syria close to Israel’s border, we must recognize that

it actually means what it says when its leaders call for the destruction of the Jewish state. We must ensure that Israel has the means to protect itself from any and every threat; so that Iran's murderous dreams never come to fruition. ■

Working Together, Despite our Disagreements

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ולא יכלו דברו לשלום (בראשית לז:ד)

The Sages in the Midrash (*Tanchuma Vayeshev 7*) taught that while Joseph and his brothers could not get along in their youth, the situation would be quite different in the future. “Joseph would ask about their welfare, and they would not answer. The Holy One said to [Joseph]: Although now when you ask about their welfare in this world they hate you, in the next world I will appease you in tranquility and make peace between you. So said David: (*Psalms 133:1*) ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’” Were the Sages correct? Have the children of Jacob come together in peace and brotherhood? According to Rabbi A.Y. Kook, we must answer emphatically in the affirmative—not because the descendants of Jacob always agree with one-another—far from it! Rather, we stand united in peace because despite our disagreements, we continue to work together for the common good.

The Talmud (*Berachot 37a*) relates that when Rabbi Akiva sided with the position of the Sages against Rabban Gamliel in a particular matter of Jewish law, Rabban Gamliel asked him, “Akiva, how long will you poke your head into quarrels?” Rabbi Akiva responded: “You have taught us, master, that when an individual disputes with the majority, the *halachah* is determined by the majority.” Why do we follow the position of the majority? Rav Kook (see *Ein Ayah Berachot* vol. 2 p. 8) explains that we do this in order to foster peace in the world. In any dispute, we should always strive to arrive at the truth. Yet, in many disputes, there is no one true answer, but instead different positions which reflect equally important values. How then do we decide? We follow the majority, “for the sake of peace so that we do not increase disputes in Israel.” Rabbi Akiva accepted the position of the Sages, “not because he knew that they were more correct, but instead from his recognition that a love of peace, which is the foundation of the world, demands this.” Even if Rabbi Akiva had himself personally agreed with Rabban Gamliel, he would still submit to the will of the majority for the sake of peace. Rav Kook reminds us that peace is not the absence of disagreement. Quite the contrary: peace is the willingness to submit to the will of the majority despite the fact that one disagrees. Peace is the ability to work and compromise with those with whom we disagree for the benefit of the community and the greater good.

Today, we see this critical value of peace practiced not only in our own Jewish community, but in the halls of Congress as well. It goes without saying that different parts of the Jewish community disagree on many issues. Yet, the Children of Israel as a whole nonetheless represent the value of peace precisely because we work together across the religious and political spectrum on behalf of the state of Israel. We are not only able, but willing, to put aside our differences when the security and safety of Israel is at stake. The same holds true for our elected officials. In today's polarized political climate, our members of Congress come together rarely, if ever. Yet, when issues related to Israel come to a vote, we regularly find broad bipartisan agreement in support of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship. For instance, last month, the [Jerusalem Post reported](#) that, the “House Foreign Affairs Committee approved legislation that would compel the Palestinian Authority to end its program of compensating the families of convicted terrorists for their crimes. The legislation, titled the Taylor Force Act, earned unanimous bipartisan support from committee members.”

Let us not think for our moment that these two peace communities are unconnected. Peace within our community and our united voice in support of Israel represents the critical force behind the bipartisan support fundamental to the solid relationship between the United States and Israel. Rabban Gamliel did not change his mind in his dispute with the Sages, nor should he have. Yet, he rightfully accepted Rabbi Akiva's message of peace: Although do not always agree, we can and must submit to the will of the majority for the sake of peace within our community, which brings benefit and blessing to the community at large. ■

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