

# THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

9 - 10 January, 2009

14 Tevet 5769

Parashat Vayechi  
(Genesis 47:28–50:26)

Rabbi Stan Zamek  
Song Leader Shani Ben Or

## From the Rabbi's desk

Each Monday, almost without fail, I begin my day off with the netcast of Meet the Press. I am a news junkie at the best of times, but when crises erupt, as they do all too often, my need for information grows exponentially. So this week, in the midst of Israel's struggle against Hamas I sought out my most trusted source of analysis, knowing that even on the sober and thoughtful Meet the Press I was likely to hear at least some anti-Israel bias. I did hear a bit, but I also heard the insightful and sobering analysis of Jeffrey Goldberg.

Goldberg, formerly of the New Yorker and now a writer for The Atlantic, is a uniquely positioned commentator. He is a former IDF soldier, a supporter of Israel, but not an uncritical one, and a proponent of the two state solution. He also has Palestinian friends in Gaza that he fears for, even as he understands why Israel moved into Gaza.

Meet the Press host David Gregory was exploring the issue of whether Hamas could be deterred by the current or any military operation and framed the issue by quoting from Jeffrey Goldberg's blog post of his interview with Hamas leader Nizar Rayyan:

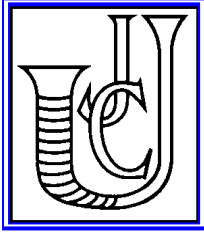
*"There are things I didn't know about Rayyan, such as that he had four wives - a fact that tells you something about the culture of Hamas - but I knew that he was sincere in his devotion to the cause of Israel's annihilation. The question I wrestle with constantly is whether Hamas is truly, theologically implacable. That is to say, whether the organization can remain true to its understanding of Islamic law and God's word and yet enter into a long-term non-aggression treaty with Israel. I tend to think not, though I've noticed over the years a certain plasticity of belief among some Hamas ideologues. Also, this is the Middle East, so anything is possible.*

*There was no flexibility with Rayyan. This is what he said when I asked him if he could envision a 50-year hudna (or cease-fire) with Israel: 'The only reason to have a hudna is to prepare yourself for the final battle. We don't need 50 years to prepare ourselves for the final battle with Israel.' There is no chance, he said, that true Islam would ever allow a Jewish state to survive in the Muslim Middle East. 'Israel is an impossibility. It is an offense against God.'"*

Goldberg then offered this observation:

*"Well, it's hard to negotiate with God, obviously. You can achieve military deterrence for a time, obviously. You can stop Hamas from getting access to rockets. Politically deterrence ... is more difficult, and theologically it's near impossible. This ... is not something that people in Hamas, sincere believers, believe is possible. You cannot allow a Jewish state to remain in the Middle East. So the ... problem arises then, what is there to talk about? And like I said, when you're negotiating with a political party like Fatah on the West Bank, it's one thing. When you're negotiating with God, it's quite different."*

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Too often the media obscures the true face of Hamas, despite the fact that people like Rayyan are not reticent about showing it. In the news Hamas terrorists are termed "militants." This is sanitized newspeak that does not begin to inform the casual reader or viewer of the character of what Thomas Friedman has rightly called the Hamas "cult of death."

The lack of understanding of the current conflict is not the fault of the media, rather the media and the general public it serves both suffer from a kind of historical attention deficit disorder. Listening to news reports and to the comments of those protesting Israel's "aggression" in Gaza one would think that the conflict just started yesterday as an unprovoked attack. No one seems to remember that Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005. None one recalls that after Hamas committed to a cease fire it then regularly violated it by rocket attacks on Israeli civilians, or that it refused to renew the cease fire when it expired. The average news reporter and the average news consumer seem to have the historical perspective of a fruit fly.

Of course, with some this historical myopia is not unfortunate ignorance but deliberate obfuscation. In the streets and on the airwaves there are those who willfully ignore both history and common sense to decry any action that Israel takes in self-defense. The subtext of this kind of condemnation of Israel's "aggression" or "genocide" is simply this: As Israel is, in essence, is illegitimate, it does not have the same right to act in its own defense that other nations do. No argument, however incisive, will alter such views. "What if," we might say, "Mexico regularly peppered El Paso and San Diego with mortars and rockets. Wouldn't you demand that something be done?" But we would be wasting our breath, because the crucial difference is that it is Israel that is acting and the ordinary rules of national self preservation do not apply.

Although I have my views on the subject, I am not necessarily endorsing this operation or any particular component of it. I am simply venting my frustration that too few appreciate the realities of this situation. Too few understand that Israel had only unpalatable options — to passively accept attacks on its territory and thereby endanger its own citizens and send the message to its other enemies that it has perhaps lost its will to repel attack, or to stir up the hornets nest of Gaza once again and, however unintentionally, inevitably harm the innocent in the pursuit of the guilty. We should be thankful that we are spared such a calculus.

I pray these days for many things and many people — for those in bomb shelters in Israel waiting for the rockets to hit, for the soldiers of the IDF forced once again to fight in Gaza, for innocent Palestinians whose evil leadership uses them to shield its bomb factories and rocket launchers and who convinces their children to die for nothing, for a world in which good people are given only painful choices. And I pray for peace — real peace, not a tense pause between explosions of violence — soon, and in our day. Amen.

All Blessings  
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*8<sup>th</sup> January, 2009*