

Vayigash

December 23, 2017

יִשְׁלַח אֶת-אָחָיו, וַיֵּלְכוּ; וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם, אֶל-תְּרַגְּזוּ בַדֶּרֶךְ.

So he sent his brothers away and they departed and he said to them 'See that you do not fall out by the way.'



The opening of portion *Vayigash* is a passionate appeal by Judah to Joseph for his younger brother Benjamin's freedom. The scene is heart-wrenching and revealing as Judah believes that he is at the mercy of one of the highest officials in the land. Here Judah, the primary one guilty of selling Joseph into slavery, now offers to become Joseph's slave.

Joseph learns that his disappearance (and feigned death) has caused his father Jacob a measure of grief so great that the loss of his youngest son Benjamin would kill him. Joseph also recognizes that the brothers who stand before him now are not the brothers he knew in his youth. While earlier they had been enraged by Jacob's favoritism of Joseph, they are now ready to protect their younger brother Benjamin and show compassion for their father. It is this

newfound recognition that causes Joseph to become overcome by emotion and, realizing the dramatic turning point that is about to occur in his life and the life of his family, he breaks down, sobbing so loudly all could hear him through a closed door.

There were many such moments in the early days of establishing the Jewish state, dramatic instances that signaled turning points in the lives of individual Zionists and the Jewish people. One such moment, in which a leader, like Joseph, broke down in tears took place at the [20th Zionist Congress](#) in Zurich on August 4, 1937. In his report on the political climate in Palestine, [Chaim Weizmann](#), president of World Zionist Organization, promised that he would attempt to confine himself to an impartial assessment of the situation, with the disclaimer that no one can completely refrain from revealing human feelings.

Weizmann's words revealed his frustration at the lag between the British Mandate's agreement to facilitate the creation of a Jewish national home and their procrastination in doing so. After the outbreak of [communal violence in 1936](#), the British, as they had after the 1929 Arab riots, sent several British officials to Palestine to investigate. As they had previously, the British again sought to know the cause of Arab discontent that morphed into violence against British institutions and Jewish lives and property. The British officers comprised the Palestine Royal Commission, headed by Lord Peel. In his speech, Weizmann blamed Britain's repeated calls for investigation and inquiry as a delaying tool which only

added to ongoing Arab violence and bolstered the Arab refusal to accept the Jewish national home. Issued in July 1937, the [Peel Report](#) called for the establishment of two states in Palestine, linked by an economic union (the same political solution for Palestine's future that the UN would endorse a decade later in November 1947).

At the 20th Zionist Congress Weizmann confronted the British leadership and said, "You shall not play fast and loose with the Jewish people...this trifling with a nation bleeding from a thousand wounds must not be done by the British whose Empire is built on moral principles—that mighty Empire must not commit this sin against the People of the Book. Tell us the truth. This at least we have deserved," and at that Weizmann, it is recorded, broke down and wept. In his plea, Weizmann attempted to teach the Mandatory Power through their own national moral standards about the dangers of delaying the establishment of the Jewish national home.

Leaders rise to their positions out of their own and others' steadfast belief in their ability to govern. They appear strong and resolute. Yet, it seems, there are moments for some leaders where their emotions can overtake them. Persistence even when emotionally fraught can be an admirable trait in a leader, especially when human morality is at the heart of the matter.

Discussion Question:

Chaim Weizmann implored the Mandatory Power to proceed with the establishment of a Jewish State by arguing that the moral standards they espoused demanded this action. Discuss other instances when visionaries pushed leaders to act by arguing their own moral standards.