

OCTOBER 15, 2007

## Parashat Lech L'chah

### Building Confidence

**Vayiven sham mizbei'ach “There he built an altar” (Genesis 12:7)**

---

Generally, our ancestors' first act when arriving in a new place was to build an altar. But in the preceding *pasuk*, we're told *vaya'avor Avram ba'aretz ad m'kom Sh'chem*. Why did Avram pass through the land, only building an altar after God appears to him and promises him the land? Ramban explains that, as Avram entered Eretz Yisrael, the Canaanites were still in the land. Avram was too scared of the Canaanites to build an altar amongst their overwhelming presence. Once Hashem promises Avram the land, he is no longer afraid and has the confidence to build an altar.

Sometimes, fear can be immobilizing. We have all been in situations in which we knew the right thing to do, but were afraid of the potential consequences. It takes a special kind of strength to take action when doing nothing would be easier.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has stated his commitment to pursuing peace with the Palestinians and has repeatedly said that he is willing and desirous to deal with the Palestinian leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayad. Prime Minister Olmert is the latest in a long tradition of Israeli leaders who have demonstrated that they are serious about pursuing peace and willing to go to great lengths to try to advance that cause. The fact that Israel is willing to be so far-reaching is particularly significant given the very real security challenges that the Jewish state continues to face in the form of attacks emanating in both Gaza and the West Bank. Israel's willingness to take action for peace should be a model to her Arab neighbors, who have a responsibility to play a positive role in supporting peace.

Pursuing peace in a responsible manner is the right thing to do, but comes with inherent risks. If the Palestinian leadership continues to take necessary steps to end terrorism and corruption, Israel is prepared for peace. ■

### Standing Apart Together

**Vayageid l'Avram ha'Ivri “And he told to Avram the Hebrew” (Genesis 14:13)**

---

As the four invading kings seize the wealth of S'dom and Amarah, they also take Lot as captive. When the Torah tells us that a fugitive from the fighting told Avram of his nephew's capture, it refers to him as *Avram ha'Ivri*. Why?

Midrash (B'reishit Rabbah 42:8) teaches that R. Nehemiah explained *Ivri* as meaning Avram was a descendant of Ever, an explanation seized on by Radak and others. But the same *midrash* cites R. Yudah as saying that it means that the whole world was on one side (*ever*) while Avram was on the other. Still another interpretation in the *midrash* holds that we are to understand the word as *avar* – because Avram came from across the river.

There is no question that Avram stood apart – not just in his generation, but in human history. Standing apart can be lonely, but it can also be a mark of inner strength and willingness to act rightly even when others act otherwise.

The relationship between the United States and Israel reflects the strength of both countries and stands apart in the international community as a uniquely strong, mutually beneficial friendship. For decades, the United States and Israel have shared a deep strategic relationship aimed at confronting the common threats to both nations. During the Cold War, the United States and Israel formed a bulwark against the spread of Communism. Today, in the post-9/11 world, the United States and Israel are working closer than ever to defeat the common threats of Islamic radicalism and terrorism.

In addition to shared strategic interests, the U.S. and Israel share the common values of freedom and democracy. The American people overwhelmingly support Israel because they recognize their own values reflected in the people of the Jewish state.

We should be thankful that the United States has stood by Israel – not just because we support Israel or because, as patriotic Americans, we know that the U.S. benefits substantially from the relationship. We should also be proud because supporting Israel is the right thing to do and, as Avraham Avinu found out, doing the right thing doesn't always mean doing the easy thing. ■

## Still in Captivity

### Vayishmah Avram ki nishbah achiv “When Avram heard that his kinsman was captured” (Genesis 14:14)

Avram comes to Lot's rescue in fulfillment of the *mitzvah* (Leviticus 19:16) to save the life of an endangered person. In his commentary, Ramban points out that it must have taken Avram a long time to reach Lot and free him because of the great distance traveled.

The lesson for us is that we are required to give maximum effort over whatever length of time it takes to save the lives of our brothers and sisters when they are in captivity and danger. Even if it takes a long time. Even if it takes a lot of work.

Kidnapped Israeli soldiers Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser, and Eldad Regev remain in captivity more than a year after they were taken by terrorists in unprovoked cross-border raids. While there has been a trickle of information out of Gaza about Gilad, Iran's proxy army, Hizballah, has played a cruel game with the families of Ehud and Eldad. Recently, Ehud's wife, Karnit, gained access to a press conference at the United Nations and managed to ask Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad about her husband's whereabouts.

"Why are you not allowing the Red Cross to visit them?" she asked, according to the Jerusalem Post. When Ahmadinejad didn't respond to her questioning, despite her having been called on by the moderator, she asked, "How come you're not answering me?" Right before Goldwasser's question, Ahmadinejad refused to answer a question from Israel Channel 10 correspondent Gil Tamari. Ahmadinejad simply said, "Next question."

The first step to rescuing our siblings in captivity is remembering that they are still not home and that we have an obligation to them and to their loved ones. We must work to free Gilad, Ehud, and Eldad. ■