

NOVEMBER 3, 2008

## Parashat Lech Lecha

### Standing Up to Wrongdoers

**Vayarek et chanichav – “He hurried his disciples” (Genesis 14:14)**

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Following the conquest of Sodom, the victorious Four Kings not only ransacked the city, but also kidnapped Abram’s nephew Lot expecting a large ransom for his return. (See Sforno on 14:12) Abram, upon learning of the abduction, prepares for battle. To do so he gathers his supporters, “those born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and he rushed towards Dan.” (14:14) While the number of soldiers seems small to vanquish the Four Kings, the Midrash reduces this number drastically. Targum Yonatan ben Uziel translates the verse as follows: “When Abram learned that his nephew had been captured, he gathered his disciples for battle from the strong of his house, and they did not wish to go with him. So he chose from them Eliezer the servant of Nimrod, whose strength equaled all three hundred eighteen men, and they rushed towards Dan.” In fact, the *gematria* of Eliezer is indeed 318.

This curious and fantastic interpretation reminds us of the crucial importance of demonstrating a willingness to fight wrongdoers. Abram’s students certainly repeated his teachings, but when the time came to follow him in action they failed their teacher. Only Abram’s devoted servant Eliezer would risk himself to fight tyranny and terror.

Recently the world witnessed a similar reticence to fight terror on the part of Syria. On October, 27 the United States entered Syrian territory to attack the leader of a network that channels foreign fighters from Syria into Iraq, the Washington Post reported. Syria has long harbored terrorists groups who actively carry out murders, arms trafficking, infiltrations and suicide bombings in neighboring countries. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, while asserting his country’s rights as a sovereign nation, refuses to exercise the obligations that come with that privilege by reigning in these terrorists. For this reason, the United States, driven by its commitment to fight global terror, assumed the role of Eliezer and demonstrated a willingness to use its great strength to fight tyranny in the world.

Hopefully, soon Syria will change course and join the worldwide fight against terror while rejecting those groups committed to acts of violence. Only then can the people of Syria consider themselves “disciples of Abram” in the fullest sense. ■

### Moral Hypocrisy

**Vatukach ha’ishah beit Par’oh... – “and the woman was taken to the house of Pharaoh” (Genesis 12:14)**

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Due to famine in the Land, Abram travels to Egypt to find food. However, before arriving in Egypt he tells his wife Sarai, “Tell them that you are my sister, that it may go well with me for your sake, and I may live on account of you.” (12:13) Abram realizes that seeing Sarai’s natural beauty, the Egyptians would kill him in order to take his wife for the Pharaoh. Why, if they were willing to kill him for his wife, wouldn’t the Egyptians simply take Sarai and send Abram on his way? Abram understood the selective morality predominant during his time. The Egyptians considered adultery barbaric and unthinkable, yet they would think nothing of murdering Abram.

This selective morality - the supposed value placed on the sanctity of women while imprisoning them, and the condoning of murder in a supposedly advanced society - figures prominently today in Iran. The Islamic Republic oppresses the rights of women in the name of morality while at the same time condoning and supporting terrorist organizations dedicated to the murder of innocent civilians. Two recent events in Iran demonstrate this moral hypocrisy.

An American university student who was in Iran to visit family and research women's rights has been arrested and held in prison for more than a week, the Associated Press reported. Iranian officials said the student, Esha Momeni, was arrested for a traffic offense, however Amnesty International said in a statement that she was taken to her family's home where her computer and other materials related to her research on the Iranian women's movement were confiscated. Momeni was later taken to Evin prison, the Tehran facility notorious for holding political prisoners.

At the same time, a top Revolutionary Guards commander said that Iran is supplying weapons to “liberation armies” in the Middle East, offering the first official confirmation that the Islamic Republic provides weapons to terrorist groups in the region. General Hossein Hamedani, deputy commander of a volunteer militia that is part of the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps boasted, “Not only are our armed forces self-sufficient, liberation armies of the region get part of their weapons from us.”

This moral hypocrisy, the subjugation of women combined with the encouragement of violence, truly frightened Abram in his time - enough to bend the truth to save his own life. It is the same moral hypocrisy that Iran exhibits today while ignoring her obligations to the international community. ■

## A Contemporary Covenant

### **Karat Adonai et avram brit – “The Lord made a covenant with Abram” (Genesis 15:18)**

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In Lech Lecha the Torah relates the moving story of the *brit ben ha'betarim*, the covenant which established an eternal bond between God and Abram and his descendants. A covenant by definition requires action by both parties in the agreement. The Torah teaches that in this covenant Abram dedicated himself to God and in exchange God promised the Land of Israel to Abram and his descendants.

The *brit ben ha'betarim* highlights the duality necessary for a covenant. When an agreement becomes one-sided, the meaning behind that covenant dissipates as well, leaving an agreement in words and not in practice. In contrast, when a *brit* is fulfilled by both sides an opportunity for cooperation develops mutually beneficial bonds.

Fourteen years ago Israel and Jordan signed a peace agreement normalizing relations between the two countries. As current events have demonstrated this treaty remains strong as enhanced relations between the neighboring countries continue to flourish. Recently the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that 160 Israeli and Jordanian businessmen participated in the fifth annual conference of the Israel-Jordan Chamber of Commerce. More significantly, for the first time the conference enjoyed a substantial increase in Jordanian participants. Yael Ravia Zadok, head of the MFA's Bureau for Middle Eastern Economic Affairs, stated that “The conference represents the de-facto peace, and proves the common interests of Jordanian and Israeli businessmen in trade and business cooperation.”

In fact, the conference did even more than that. It proved that a treaty signed fourteen years ago is still effectively a *brit* - a covenant honored and practiced by both parties. We must continue to support sustained joint Arab-Israeli initiatives to promote peace in the region and prove that Israel and her neighbors can do more than simply coexist, they can thrive. ■