

OCTOBER 26, 2009

Parashat Lech Lecha

Shared Values

U'malkitzedek melech shalem – “Melchizedek king of Salem” (Genesis 14:18)

Abram's fame spread due to his legendary kindness and hospitality, yet he had a contemporary who also shared his passion for *chesed*. The Midrash identified Melchizedek as Shem, son of Noah, who survived the deluge in his father's ark. The Midrash (Midrash Shochar Tov 37, 1) related a conversation between Abram and Melchizedek. “Abram asked... ‘How did you [merit to] emerge from the ark?’ He replied, ‘Due to the kindness that we performed.’ Abram said, ‘What kindness was there to perform in the ark?’ Melchizedek answered, ‘Over the animals and birds and beasts we never slept. Rather, we spent all night feeding the animals.’” Thus, Melchizedek and Abram's love for performing acts of kindness was the shared value that united them in their efforts to bring holiness and spirituality to the world.

Melchizedek and Abram were bound by shared values and worked to make the world a better place. Today, this legacy is carried on by the United States and Israel, whose shared values bind them in the pursuit of a better world.

President Barack Obama recently sent a video message for the opening of Israeli President Shimon Peres's Facing Tomorrow Conference, in which Obama stated that “Shimon [Peres] has contributed to a deep and much abiding friendship between the U.S. and Israel. A bond that is much more than a strategic alliance. The American people and the Israeli peoples share a faith in the future and believe that democracies can shape their own destinies. And that opportunities should be available to all.” President Obama's carefully chosen words represent the true nature of the friendship between America and Israel – a friendship based not just on mutual benefit, but more importantly on shared values. These values include a firm commitment to democracy, the rule of law, freedom of religion and speech, and human rights. Moreover, the U.S. and Israel's shared commitment to peace unites both nations with the hope and determination to end conflict through discourse and negotiation. For more on the U.S.-Israel relationship, click [here](#).

The core values which the United States and Israel share have enhanced the strength of the relationship between them. Perhaps even more significantly, like the shared values of Abram and Melchizedek, their shared mission and mutual trust form the foundation that can transform their wish for peace into reality. ■

Morality First

Harimoti yadi l'El – “I have lifted up my hand to the Lord” (Genesis 14:22)

Following Abram's victory over the five kings, the king of Sodom offered to allow Abram to keep the spoils of war if Abram returned his prisoners to Sodom. Abram refused to keep any valuables at all, desiring not even “a thread nor shoestring” of ill-gotten gain. In his refusal, Abram proclaimed that he had “lifted up his hand to the God on High.” What was the meaning of this gesture? While some commentators have interpreted his hand-raising as a signal of his faith towards the heavens (see Ramban), Ohr Hachayim (on verses 22-23) explained the gesture in simpler terms: Abram lifted his hand to verify “that he had no intentions to renege in this matter, neither fully nor partially.” Rather,

Abram's gesture was a demonstration that his actions in the war emanated not from a desire to gain financially, but solely from the hope of freeing his nephew Lot.

Abram's actions were those of a man who recognized that profit must hold a secondary role to moral imperatives. The United States has recently acted on this ideal by taking a major step to ensure that its citizens can remove themselves from investments in an Iranian regime which is seeking nuclear weapons.

Recently, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed legislation that authorizes state and local governments to divest from companies investing in Iran's petroleum and natural gas sector. H.R. 1327, the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act, protects fund managers who divest from such companies from potential lawsuits, thereby facilitating state efforts to divest from the Islamist Republic. The legislation, introduced by Representatives Barney Frank (D-MA) and Mark Kirk (R-IL), passed by a bipartisan vote of 414-6. 18 states have already passed legislation divesting from Iran, including California, Florida, New Jersey, Ohio and Illinois. President Obama, who introduced his own version of the legislation as a Senator in 2007, has stated repeatedly that the United States will impose sanctions on Iran if the Islamic Republic does not meet United Nations Security Council requirements to end its nuclear program. For more on the Iran Sanctions Enabling Act, click [here](#).

Divestment from companies which profit in the Iranian energy industry adds coercive power to the efforts aimed at convincing Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program. It also sends a clear message that American citizens recognize their moral imperative, and refuse to profit from a violent regime that threatens the safety of the world. ■

The Protection of a Shield

Al tira Avram, anochi magen lach – “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield” (Genesis 15:1)

In the first paragraph of the *amidah* God is blessed as the *magen Avraham*, “shield of Abraham.” This language is derived from a verse in our *parashah* where, following the successful war with the five kings, God appeared to Abram telling him “I am your shield.” Yet, the framers of the *amidah* could have also referred to God as a “helper” or “savior” of Abram (see the prior sentence in the blessing). Why did they conclude the blessing by specifically alluding to a shield? Rabbi Avraham Katz suggested that the framers of the *amidah* sought the most powerful language possible. A helper assists, but only in times of need. A savior redeems, but only those in distress. A shield, however, works to vigilantly and continuously protect one from harm. Therefore, in the *amidah* God is referred to as the “shield of Abraham” as an allusion to this reliability and alertness.

Building on the notion of the shield, which was used by the framers of the *amidah*, the United States has recently taken steps to help shield its ally Israel, bringing added protection to the citizens of the Jewish State.

Last week, in the largest joint U.S.-Israel military exercise in history, the two countries' militaries began a major joint air defense exercise, which highlighted military ties between the two allies, the Associated Press Reported. The maneuver, codenamed Juniper Cobra 10, tested the two countries' missile defense systems and included roughly 1,000 U.S. military personnel and a similar number of Israeli troops, the Israeli military said. The U.S. also deployed 17 warships equipped with radar systems to detect surface-to-surface missiles for the exercise, including the use of cutting-edge X-band radar technology, which is used to detect incoming missiles from hundreds of miles away. This new radar will provide Israelis with critical additional warning time in the event of a ballistic missile attack. “The radar is now part of Israel's active defense lineup, on the understanding that the missile threat on Israel is growing,” a senior Israeli defense official said. American personnel man the radar system, marking the first time that foreign troops are serving to protect Israelis on Israeli soil.

Military cooperation between the United States and Israel represents a tangible demonstration of broad-based American support for the Jewish State. By not only adding critical technology to Israel's permanent defense, but also providing the manpower and logistical support to protect Israeli citizens, America is doing its part to ensure that Israel remains shielded from foreign aggression. ■

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