

OCTOBER 11, 2010

Parashat Lech Lecha

Impact Through Action

And the souls that they had gotten in Haran (Genesis 12:5) (בראשית יב:ה)

How did Abram and Sarai “get” souls in Haran? According to Rashi who explains that they “brought the [people] under the wings of the Shechinah,” (see Rashi on 12:5) Abram and Sarai did not “get” souls. Rather, they “made” (the literal translation of *asu*) the souls by bringing them closer to God, and close to themselves. So close, in fact, that when Abram relocated, his followers moved with him. How did he do it? Radak writes, “He would call to people and show them the reasons that they should believe in God and worship only God and not the idols.”

Through his initiative and passionate approach to the people, Abram successfully brought about the change he was seeking. It is that same sense of responsibility backed up with action that we must learn from as we work with our members of Congress to promote an unshakeable connection between the United States and Israel.

In politics, important policy decisions are affected by relationships. Our elected officials are expected to be experts on such a wide range of issues that they must depend on others, including their staffs and constituents, to keep them current on the vast array of issues that fall under their purview. For the Jewish community, it is imperative that we become those people who our Representatives depend on for information about Israel. Pro-Israel activists impact U.S. foreign policy toward Israel by building strong and lasting relationships with their members of Congress. Israel faces constant struggles—situated in a dangerous world neighborhood—with threats on all of her borders. With that knowledge and understanding, we do not have the luxury of waiting and hoping that members of Congress will appreciate the U.S.-Israel relationship on their own. The time to speak is always now. It is not just our right but our responsibility to teach our Representatives about the need for an unbreakable bond between the United States and Israel. In order for us to do this we must take the initiative to both foster and maintain lasting relationships with our members of Congress.

How do we do it? We build relationships by following Abram’s example of devoted action. We take the initiative to stand up and speak on Israel’s behalf. We reach out to those who we have not fostered a relationship with yet, and we work tirelessly to maintain the ties that already exist. We do it all because we believe it is our responsibility to act. ■

The Importance of Direct Communication

And Abram said to Lot (Genesis 13:8)

(בראשית יג:ח)

When the dispute between the shepherds of Abram and those of Lot reached the boiling point, Abram spoke with his nephew directly, telling him, “Please let there be no strife, between me and you, and between my shepherds and your shepherds” (13:8). Why did Abram emphasize the need to avoid a dispute between shepherds? After all, if he and Lot reached a resolution, would their shepherds not get along as well? Netziv (on 13:8) notes that Abram told Lot, “the argument between the shepherds is worse than the argument between [himself and Lot]...in that they would not speak overly harshly with each-other, while the shepherds would speak harshly.”

Abram understood the importance of speaking with his nephew directly to solve their dispute. It is in this decision that Abram exemplified the power of open direct communication to solve truly complicated situations. Today, the Palestinian Authority (PA) too must recognize that the best hope for peace in the Middle East is contingent on their continued presence in direct talks with Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently told U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East George Mitchell that Israel wants to continue negotiations with the PA, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. “We are making a joint effort with Senator Mitchell to continue talks with Abbas,” Netanyahu said. “We want to continue talks, and I want it.” Meanwhile, the Egyptian foreign minister criticized Abbas for making Israel’s West Bank construction the central issue in the negotiations rather than borders. Historically, settlements have never been the impediment to a peace agreement. And they should not be today. In fact, Israel has made countless concessions on settlements in the past—removing settlers from the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank.

Abram only reached a final and lasting agreement with his nephew by speaking with him directly. Today, similarly, there must be negotiations in order to achieve a negotiated two-state solution. There is no justification for Abbas to leave the talks, but more importantly than that, there are countless reasons for him to stay. ■

Financial Withholding

I will not take a thread nor a shoelace (Genesis 14:23)

אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל (בראשית יד:כג)

Why did Abram refuse to take even a hint of a tribute from the King of Sodom after his military victory? After all, Abram had accepted gifts from others in the past, including the Egyptian Pharaoh as well as Abimelech, the Philistine King. Why not accept gifts now? Netziv in Ha’amek Davar (on 14:23) explains simply, “Regarding the King of Sodom, he knew about him that he was miserly and would consider the tribute a gift (with the expectation of reimbursement). He also did not want to give him prominence at all, and to make an association with him.”

Abram refused to engage in any financial interaction with the King of Sodom because he understood the negative implications of that association. Presently, sanctions are successfully encouraging companies across the globe to withdraw from any financial dealings with Iran, making a powerful statement and placing significant economic pressure on the Iranian regime.

On a daily basis Iran is confronted by new pressures brought on by the severe U.S., U.N. and EU sanctions imposed on the regime over the past few months, [The Washington Post](#) reported last week. The sanctions are causing prices to rise and making it increasingly difficult for Iranian companies to work internationally. “We are already receiving reports that the regime is quite worried about the impact of these measures, especially on their banking system and on the prospects for economic growth,” said Treasury Department official Stuart Levey. “And, as pressure increases, so has internal criticism of Ahmadinejad and others for failing to prepare adequately for international sanctions and for underestimating their effect.”

Additionally, banks in the United Arab Emirates have curtailed financial dealings with a handful of Iranian banks blacklisted by the U.S. Treasury, drying up one of Iran’s financial lifelines. Following these fresh financial sanctions from the UAE, the rial—Iran’s currency—plummeted by 15 percent, leaving traders and importers with evaporating bank accounts. As a result, many Iranians are facing dwindling buying power and are reconsidering their faith in the currency.

By rejecting Sodom’s offering, Abram makes a truly powerful statement that he does not want to be aligned with or show support for Sodom’s corrupt regime. In this same vein, the international coalition that has refused to engage in financial dealings with Iran is making the same strong declaration—and standing up for what they believe in: a better and safer future for the Middle East. ■

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