

OCTOBER 31, 2011

Parashat Lech Lecha

A Circle of Blessings

And I will bless those who bless you (Genesis 12:3)

ואברכה מברכיך (בראשית יב:ג)

What is the nature of the people who would bless Abram and receive blessings in return? Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (commentary of Genesis 12:3) explains that God told Abram, “Those that bless you, help you, who recognize and appreciate your principles, and submit to your moral sensibility and your honoring God—those will I bless.” Radak (on 12:12) notes that “Those who share a covenant with you and seek your well-being...I will bless them because of you, and they will recognize that through their love for you their benefit will increase.” Thus, we understand that those who blessed Abram were the people who shared his values and cherished his friendship.

Like those who shared a covenant with Abram and received blessings in return, the people of the United States enjoy tangible benefits as a result of the shared values and strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

The United States and Israel have developed a resilient friendship, based in large part to an unshakable dedication to common values. Commitment to democracy, the rule of law, freedom of religion and speech and human rights are all core values shared by the two countries. Both nations were founded by refugees seeking political and religious freedom. Both were forced to fight for independence against foreign powers. Both have absorbed waves of immigrants seeking political freedom and economic well-being. And both have evolved into democracies that respect the rule of law, the will of voters and the rights of minorities. These shared values are the basis for the high level of strategic cooperation between the two countries. American-Israeli cooperation begins with frequent high-level strategic dialogues among senior political and military leaders and extends to combined military planning and exercises, intelligence-sharing and technological development. Israel’s military strength and central geo-strategic location also provide a strong deterrent against Iran and other radical forces that threaten America, its allies and regional and global U.S. objectives. For more on the U.S.-Israel relationship, click [here](#).

American support for Israel stems from a belief in freedom and democracy that is cherished by both nations. And, just as those who blessed Abram enjoyed God’s blessing in return, America’s blessings of Israel have been returned to the citizens of the United States. ■

Culture of Kidnapping

And they took Lot (Genesis 14:12)

ויקחו את לוט (בראשית יד:יב)

In the verse that chronicles the capture of Lot, the Torah reminds us that Lot was “Abram’s brother’s son” (12:12). Yet, the Torah had previously described Abram as Lot’s uncle (see 12:5). Why repeat this information about their familial relationship? S’forno (on 12:12) explains that “They took pains to capture Lot because he was Abram’s nephew. For they knew of his wealth, and expected that Abram would redeem him for an exorbitant sum.” Therefore, the Torah repeats the description of Lot’s relationship with Abram because it was not incidental. Lot was captured precisely because of his connection to Abram and the expected reward that his ransom would bring.

Unfortunately, the idea that kidnapping is a legitimate tactic for extortion is not relegated to ancient history. This fact has become abundantly clear in the wake of the deal to free Gilad Shalit.

Both the terrorist organization Hamas and the Palestinian Authority are honoring—with prestige, cash and luxury hotel stays—the Palestinian terrorists recently released by Israel to free abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. In fact, the released terrorists have received overwhelming support from the Palestinian population; Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians rallied in Ramallah and Gaza to celebrate the release of Palestinians convicted of carrying out some of the worst terrorist attacks in Israel's history. In addition, the Saudi cleric Awad Al-Qarni posted a message on his Facebook page offering a \$100,000 reward to any Palestinian who kidnaps an Israeli soldier, the Middle East Media Research Institute [reported](#). Al-Qarni wrote: “Media reports have circulated the news that the Zionist settlers are paying large sums of money to anyone who [can] kill the released Palestinian prisoners, and in response to those criminals, I announce to the world that I [hereby] commit to pay a reward and a prize in the amount of \$100,000 to any Palestinian who imprisons [i.e. takes as a hostage] an Israeli soldier inside Palestine, for the purpose of prisoner exchange.” For more on how Palestinians glorify released terrorists, click [here](#).

Abram confronted an adversary who viewed kidnapping as a legitimate and desirable extortion tactic. Today, radical Islamic groups have adopted this ethic, extolling the kidnapping of Israelis as a means to extort concessions from the Jewish state. ■

A Quick Response

And he led forth his trained men (Genesis 14:14)

וירק את הניכיו (בראשית יד:יד)

Upon learning about the brazen capture of Lot, Abram could have chosen to react in a measured and careful fashion. Yet, we read that “when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth (*vayarek*) his trained men” (14:14). Rashi explains that the word *vayarek* means that Abram “acted with alacrity,” moving immediately to rectify Lot’s predicament. The Midrash notes that when the prophet Isaiah lauded the man who “stops his ears from hearing of blood” (Isaiah 33:15), he was referring to someone like Abram, willing to take action to prevent others’ suffering. Instead of looking the other way, Abram took action to prevent Lot’s captors from persecuting others.

Abram responded immediately to the kidnapping of Lot, acting quickly in order to deter additional abductions. The United States, which recently uncovered an Iranian terrorist plot on American soil, is following Abram’s lead and responding quickly to prevent future provocations from the Islamic Republic.

The Justice Department recently charged Gholam Shakuri, a member of the Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp, and Manssor Arbabsia, a naturalized U.S. citizen holding Iranian and U.S. passports, for plotting to assassinate Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the United States, Adel Al-Jubeir. Attorney General Eric Holder said the plot was “directed and approved by elements of the Iranian government and, specifically, senior members of the Quds Force,” and that “high-up officials...were responsible for this plot.” U.S. officials implicated Abdul Reza Shahlai, a senior commander in Iran’s Quds Force, who had been linked to the killing of American troops in Iraq. In response, the United States is seeking European support for tougher sanctions on Iran, [Reuters](#) reported. David Cohen, Treasury Undersecretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, said he met British officials in London to discuss potential new sanctions focusing on Iran’s access to the global financial system. “Iran needs to be held accountable for this plot,” Cohen said. Any further sanctions would also be part of efforts to deter Iran from pursuing nuclear capabilities, Cohen added, and could target the country’s central bank. “We are going to continue to look at those financial institutions that are involved with proliferation activity for Iran and continue to try to isolate them from the international financial sector.” For more on the foiled Iranian plot, click [here](#).

Iran’s plot to attack targets on American soil exposes Tehran’s continued threat to America and our allies. Like Abram, who immediately responded to Lot’s capture, the United States understands that immediate action is the only way to prevent future plots. ■

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