

OCTOBER 22, 2012

Parashat Lech Lecha

Shifting Blame

And Abram went down to Egypt (Genesis 12:10)

וירד אברם מצרימה (בראשית יב:י)

Commentators wonder why Abram fled to Egypt during the famine. Shouldn't he have had faith and remained in Canaan? Rabbi Yitzchak Caro (in his work *Toldot Yitzchak*) explains that Abram feared being wrongfully blamed for the famine. As a prophet of monotheism in a polytheistic country, Abram feared that the local residents would connect the famine with his recent arrival to the land, and blame the famine on his "heretical" views and his success in converting some of the local residents to monotheism. Therefore, to prevent the blame for the famine from falsely falling on his shoulders, Abram fled to Egypt.

Recognizing human nature, Abram understood that the Canaanites would attempt to shift the blame for their calamity to a cause that would unite the people. Similarly, leaders of Iran are now attempting to shift the blame for the country's economic woes, downplaying Iran's uranium enrichment and consequent international sanctions.

As the United Nations approved yet another round of sanctions targeting Iran's economic sector, leaders in Iran tried to deflect the blame for Iran's plummeting economy from sanctions to internal mismanagement. According to the [Christian Science Monitor](#), religious leaders in Iran are now both minimizing the scope of the suffering in Iran, while at the same time blaming Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Lawmakers and ordinary Iranians blame the high inflation and unemployment on the government's mishandling. Even Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei claimed that while the sanctions may cause problems, "mismanagement may even increase these problems." Religious leaders across Iran echoed this sentiment, laying the bulk of the blame for [Iran's plummeting currency](#) not on the sanctions, but rather on government incompetence. An ayatollah in Mashhad said that "only a small portion of economic problems were because of sanctions; the main cause is the [government's] erroneous policies." Iran's religious leaders hope to avoid acknowledging the crushing toll that the international sanctions have taken on Iran's economy. Rather than accepting that sanctions and economic despair are a direct result of Iran's refusal to halt uranium enrichment and cooperate with international guidelines, they have blamed the ineffectiveness of Iran's leadership. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Abram left Canaan to prevent the people from falsely casting blame on him for their suffering. While Iran is mimicking the Canaanite approach, their leaders should recognize that the best way to heal the economy is to cease enriching uranium and comply with United Nations resolutions. ■

Laws of Egypt

Say, please, you are my sister (Genesis 12:13)

אמרי נא אחותי את (בראשית יב:יג)

Forced to flee the famine ravaging Canaan to find food in Egypt, Abram made a unique request of his wife Sarai before they entered the country. "Say, please, you are my sister; that it may be well with me for your sake, and that my soul may live because of you" (12:13). Why did Abram fear for his life? The Midrash (See *Otzar Hamidrashim Bereishit* p. 94) explains that Abram realized that the Egyptians would want to take Sarai from him as a wife for the Pharaoh because of her unusual beauty. Yet, in a demonstration of their perverse morality, while the Egyptians would

never violate a married woman, they would happily kill Abram in order to render Sarai an unmarried widow. Therefore, to protect his own life, Abram asked Sarai to pretend to be his sister, and not his wife.

The unjust ancient Egypt that Abram encountered condoned and encouraged individual rights abuses. As modern Egypt drafts its new constitution, it's troubling that the proposed draft might limit basic rights or freedoms.

Recently, Egypt unveiled a proposed draft of a new constitution amid criticism from liberals and human rights groups that the document is tilted toward Islamic law and endangers the democratic ideals of the uprising that last year overthrew Hosni Mubarak, [The Los Angeles Times](#) reported. The draft, crafted by a 100-member assembly dominated by Islamists, states that Egypt is “a democratic regime” guided by the principles of *sharia*, or Islamic law. The wording in some articles, such as those dealing with equality for men and women, are either explicitly tied to strict Islamic precepts or open to interpretation. Human Rights Watch (HRW) criticized the provision as “not consistent with international human rights law.” In a recent report, the organization said that the proposed draft “contains many loopholes that would allow future authorities to repress and limit basic rights and freedoms.” However, HRW did credit parts of the draft for upholding political and economic rights, including forbidding the creation of special or military courts to try civilians, a tactic used often by Mubarak and the former ruling military council. A court is expected to rule on whether to disband the assembly, possibly voiding the proposed draft, over accusations that the body does not represent all Egyptians. For more on Egypt, click [here](#).

As opposed to ancient Egypt which endangered Abram's safety and freedom, today's Egypt has the opportunity to guarantee the basic democratic freedoms all Egyptian citizens deserve. ■

A Protective Shield

Fear not Abram (Genesis 15:1)

אל תירא אברם (בראשית טו:א)

Rashi (on 15:1) explains that after fighting a brutal war repatriating Lot from captivity, Abram feared that the surviving neighbors would attack him in revenge. For this reason, God appeared to Abram and told him, “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield” (15:1). The Midrash elaborates on the imagery God utilized to illustrate the level of protection that Abram would enjoy. God told Abram, “Even if all the swords in the world attacked if—[this shield] would stand against them, so too you: even if all the nations in the world gather against you I will fight against them.”

Just as God promised to stand with Abram as a shield and a protector, an ongoing joint military exercise demonstrates how the United States stands side by side with Israel as the Jewish state defends itself against the threat of attack.

The United States and Israel recently commenced the largest-ever joint air defense drill of its kind, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. Earlier this month, large numbers of American soldiers began arriving in Israel, where they set up aerial defense positions on Israeli territory and on U.S. Navy vessels off the Israeli coastline. The three-week drill named Austere Challenge 12 (AC12), held approximately every two years, simulated various missile defense scenarios. One of its objectives was to facilitate the rapid deployment of U.S. missile defense systems to Israel and test their ability to operate in conjunction with Israeli defense systems during a conflict. U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Craig Franklin said it is about improving U.S.-Israeli military capabilities. “We are military professionals coming together to train for [a] defensive mission,” the U.S. Department of Defense [reported](#). The IDF Spokesman's Office [said](#) that the drill forms “another milestone in the common strategic relations between the U.S. and Israel.” For more on the military partnership between the U.S. and Israel, click [here](#).

Like the shield promised to Abram that helped him protect himself, this joint training exercise demonstrates how American and Israeli militaries are working together to make each nation stronger. ■

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