

OCTOBER 27, 2014

## Parashat Lech Lecha

### Every Step We Take

Go forth from your land (Genesis 12:1)

לך לך מארצך (בראשית יב:א)

The Dubno Maggid (see Shivim Panim L'torah vol. 1 pp. 77-78) noted that there are two types of journeys: a journey with a concrete destination and a journey where one is fleeing from his original point of departure. When one is fleeing, every step has meaning as it brings him one step farther away from where he does not want to be. On the other hand, if the trip is only about the destination, each step lacks meaning, and the ultimate goal is only achieved at final arrival. This, he explains, is why Abram is instructed to go “from your land.” (12:1) Midrash Rabbah notes that this was, “To give Abram reward for each and every step.” While the final destination was important, each and every step carried great significance as well.

In many areas of life, while we work to achieve an end-goal, every step in the process carries significance. This idea is especially relevant to the work that we do to support a strong, vibrant U.S.-Israel relationship.

Supporters of a strong U.S.-Israel relationship recognize that realizing the goal of a safe, secure Israel, has demanded—and will continue to demand—a long, arduous journey. While the efforts of Americans supportive of Israel have accomplished a great deal—bringing crucial financial, military and diplomatic support for the Jewish state—a great deal of work remains. Israel finds itself under attack on many fronts. On the physical front heavily armed radical terrorist groups continue to dream up new ways to attack the citizens of the Jewish state. On the diplomatic front Israel's critics attack its legitimacy both in the halls of governments across the world, and in international arenas. Finally, those who wish to do harm to Israel continue to wage a battle for the hearts and minds of people around the world. We must do our part in this fight. While we may not join the IDF soldiers on the physical front, every step we take on the other fronts—by working with our elected officials and supporting Israel's right to self-defense online, in the media, and even in our neighborhoods—these steps are not just important. These steps are critical and drive us that much farther in the journey towards security for the people of Israel.

Just as each step Abram took played an important role in his journey, every step we take— no matter how small— plays a critical role in our collective work to protect, defend and support the Jewish state. ■

### Venturing Into the Unknown

To the Land that I will show you (Genesis 12:1)

אל הארץ אשר אראך (בראשית יב:א)

While Abram is commanded to “Go forth” and leave the comfort and safety of home for a strange land, he is never given the final destination for his journey. Rather, he must travel to an unnamed, “Land that I will show you.” The Midrash [Tanchuma Hakadmon] notes that this represented “a test within a test. Is there a person who travels, though he does not know his destination? Yet, what did Abram do? ‘And Abram went...’” Abram recognized that great benefit only comes to those willing to take a journey into the unknown. So, with faith in the future, he took that first step on his great journey which ultimately changed the course of human history.

Great achievements stem from courageous leaders willing to venture out even when the final outcome is not clear. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas must come to this realization for there to be a possibility of peace with Israel.

During his [troubling address](#) to the United Nations General Assembly in September, in addition to perpetrating the vicious lie that Israel committed genocide against the Palestinian people, Abbas also announced his plan to sidestep peace talks by submitting a resolution to the United Nations Security Council, setting a deadline for Israel's withdrawal to pre-June 1967 lines. Abbas refuses to negotiate in good faith, insisting instead on determining the final outcome before talks even begin. Yet, such an imposed outcome will bring neither peace nor a Palestinian state, for this can only be the result of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement. In a [recent address](#) to the UN Security Council, Ambassador David Roet, Israel's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations said that, "There are no shortcuts when it comes to making peace. Making peace requires courageous leaders—leaders who speak about partnership and denounce prejudice; leaders who embrace tolerance and reject terrorism; leaders who believe in cooperation instead of conflict..."

Peace can only be achieved through direct negotiations without preconditions. Palestinian attempts to achieve statehood through international organizations only harm their cause. The United States and international community should continue to urge President Abbas to return to bilateral negotiations with Israel and avoid counter-productive, unilateral steps at the United Nations or the International Criminal Court.

Abram bravely ventured out into the unknown without first knowing his final destination. The Palestinians must follow his example and enter into talks with Israel without insisting on knowing the outcome before they begin. ■

## Maintaining Our Integrity

**Neither a thread nor a shoelace (Genesis 14:23)**

**אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל (בראשית יד:כג)**

After defeating the armies of the kings who had captured the city of Sodom, the repatriated Sodomite King hopes to reach an agreement with Abram: "Give me the people and take the goods for yourself." (14:21) Abram refuses even the smallest amount of personal gain from the ruler of the evil city, "lest you should say, I made Abram rich." (14:23) Rabbi Simon Peretz writes that Abram refused any financial benefit because he recognized that any material benefit he might gain from a city known for theft and corruption would morally taint him. The Midrash makes precisely this point when it compares Abram's actions to a verse in Isaiah: "'He that despises the gain of oppressions'—[this is the motivation for Abram's declaration of] 'Neither a thread nor a shoelace.'" (Midrash Rabbah 58)

Abram refused to accept benefit from Sodom for fear of tainting himself in the process. As the U.S. negotiates with Iran, it also must ensure that it does not accept a bad deal that compromises America's international standing.

For many months, [the President](#), the [Secretary of State](#), the [Secretary of Defense](#), the [Chief U.S. Negotiator](#), the [U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations](#) and the [State Department Spokeswoman](#) (and her [deputy](#)) have all insisted that "No deal [with Iran] is better than a bad deal" over the Islamic regime's nuclear program. Additionally, in an [op-ed article](#) in the New York Times, Israeli Minister of Intelligence Yuval Steinitz noted that saying "no" to Iran, in addition to increasing the pressure on Iran to comply with the world's demands, would have another critical benefit. "Not reaching a nuclear deal at this stage...can even be regarded as a qualified success, since it would represent the integrity of an international community adhering to its principles rather than sacrificing the future of global security because it is distracted by the worthy fight against Islamic State terrorists." By keeping to its word and refusing to accept a bad deal with Iran, the U.S. will maintain its integrity and standing in the international community. More importantly, it will also transmit the clear message to the leaders in Tehran that the only way to escape mounting pressure will be to accept the will of the international community and abandon its illicit nuclear weapons program.

Abram refused to make an agreement with Sodom that would forever taint his reputation. The U.S. must follow in his footsteps, and say no to a bad deal that will compromise America's standing in the world. ■

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