

NOVEMBER 7, 2016

Parashat Lech Lecha

Tunnel Terror Tactics

And they took Lot (Genesis 14:12)

ויקחו את לוט (בראשית י"ד:יב)

HBO recently announced that it will team up with Israeli production company Keshet International to produce a drama series about the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teens two years ago, the [Times of Israel reported](#). The kidnapping and murder of Gil-ad Shaar, Eyal Yifrach and Naftali Fraenkel, dramatically raised tensions with Hamas and ultimately helped lead to the 2014 Gaza war. During the war, Israelis discovered the extent to which Hamas considered kidnapping a critical military tactic. According to a [2014 article in the Daily Beast](#), when Israeli soldiers uncovered the tens of terror tunnels leading from Gaza into Israel, they found Hamas fighters with large bags, tranquilizer guns and handcuffs. “Throughout this operation, Hamas operatives have continuously tried to infiltrate into Israel through the tunnels in order to kidnap Israeli soldiers and civilians, [an Israeli] official said.”

Jews have been dealing with the threat of kidnapping and abduction throughout our history. While Maimonides said that “there is no mitzvah as great as redeeming captives” (see [Maimonides, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 8:10](#)), the Sages in the Mishnah felt the need to limit the scope of the mitzvah. The Mishnah states that, “Captives should not be ransomed for more than their value, for the sake of the general welfare.” The rabbis recognized that the willingness of the Jewish community to ransom captives at almost any cost would undoubtedly encourage additional kidnapping. In fact, the threat of kidnapping has threatened our people since the time of Abram. In Parashat Lech Lecha, we read that in the context of the war between the Four Kings and the Five Kings, the city of Sodom is captured by the Four Kings, landing Abram’s nephew Lot in captivity. When Abram learns of his relative’s detention, he gathers an armed militia to free the captives. Rabbi Chaim ben Atar, in his *Ohr Hachaim* commentary (on verse 14) wonders why Abram did not first reach out in peace and dialogue with the four kings before attacking. Rabbi ben Atar explains that, “It was known to them that Lot was the nephew of Abram. [Lot] was taken prisoner after they knew that he was Abram’s nephew, and through this [action] they revealed that they were the enemies of Abram.”

Today, the state of Israel continues to grapple with the difficult challenge of a Hamas regime intent on capturing innocent Israelis for the purpose of extracting outrageous concessions from the Israeli government. During Operation Protective Edge, IDF Col. Tomer Ifrach’s patrol was attacked by a Hamas cell hiding in a tunnel, two of his soldiers were killed. In an [article on Ynetnews.com](#), Ifrach, who was recently named the operations officer for the IDF’s Southern Command, explained his view of the tunnel threat. “Hamas is investing thousands of man hours into tunneling. It’s taking over a large portion of the Gaza Strip’s economy, and pulling Gaza downward—literally. They’ve developed a high level of expertise in the field over the past 20 years. That takes almost every resource that has entered the strip from its residents: Wood, concrete, tools. It leads to high taxes on residents, who are already greatly suffering...The working assumption and our estimates are that there are more tunnel entries in Israeli territory. We’ve been investing great resources to locate them, particularly over the past year.”

With [strong backing from the United States to develop anti-tunneling technology](#), Israel is investing NIS 2.5 billion in the “Barrier project,” designed to block Hamas tunnels, which includes an underground wall dug dozens of meters deep into the earth, a smart fence along the border and advanced means of detection. Still, despite this massive investment, Ifrach warned that, “I cannot say that the barrier we’re building will provide 100 percent protection, because there is no 100 percent.” Like Abram did so many years ago, even with the tremendous advances of technology, Israel will continue to deal with the threat of kidnapping and abductions long into the future. ■

The Proper Way to Negotiate

And there was a strife (Genesis 13:7)
(יג:ז)

ויהי ריב (בראשית)

Late last month, a panel at the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) approved a second controversial resolution ignoring Jewish and Christian ties to the Temple Mount, [the Times of Israel reported](#). The resolution entitled “Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls,” accuses Israel of numerous violations, refers to the Temple Mount compound solely by its Muslim names, “Al-Aqsa Mosque/Al-Haram Al-Sharif” and defines it only as “a Muslim holy site of worship.” While deeply troubling to Jews around the world who feel a deep connection to the holy site, these resolutions, which the [Boston Globe called](#) a “distortion of history,” represents a troubling trend on the part of the Palestinians. Rather than negotiate with Israel, they prefer one-sided, crude attempts in international bodies to attack and delegitimize the Jewish state. Every time steps like these move forward, they encourage the Palestinian Authority (PA) to pursue similar efforts rather than returning to the negotiating table to reach an equitable settlement. Instead of following this futile path, the Palestinians should look to our mutual forefather, Abram, as an example of conflict resolution.

In the very first dispute recorded in the Torah, strife erupts between the shepherds of Abram and the shepherds of Lot, to the point where, “they could not dwell together.” (Genesis 13:6) Abram immediately enters into negotiations with his nephew to reach an amicable separation: “If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” Netziv, in his *Ha’amek Davar* commentary (on verse 9) notes the double language in Abram’s offer. Why does he mention his willingness to go in either direction—left or right? Netziv answers that the extraneous language demonstrates Abram’s willingness to make significant concessions in order to achieve a peaceful settlement with Lot. “Abram’s ethics were of a positive nature so that he did not wish to place the entire of the separation upon Lot alone; rather, [the burden fell] upon them both, each one aside the other.” Abram repeated his offer to go in either direction to emphasize his willingness to move in the opposite course of whichever direction Lot ultimately chooses. Abram’s actions represent an important example of conflict resolution. First and foremost, when the specter of dispute appeared, Abram confronted Lot in the context of a discussion. Instead of taking action, he negotiated. More importantly, although Abram ostensibly could have imposed his will upon his nephew, he never considered this as an option. Rather, he negotiated with Lot in good faith, demonstrating a willingness to make significant concessions to achieve a peaceful resolution.

Israel has long demonstrated a similar willingness towards the PA. For years, Israel has called upon the PA to halt its campaign of incitement and demonization of Israel both at home and around the world, only to have its calls fall upon deaf ears. Speaking after the first UNESCO resolution at an [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) (IPU) meeting in Geneva last month, Israeli Member of Knesset Nachman Shai encouraged the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table. [According to the Jerusalem Post](#), when the Palestinian representative to the IPU, Muhammad Al-Ahmad blamed Israel for the freeze in negotiations, Shai—a member of the opposition in the Knesset—expressed frustration and noted that the Palestinians are not willing to negotiate with Israel in good faith. Even as a member of the opposition Shai thinks Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is the one who needs to give Israel a positive answer, having been given many chances, including recently, to enter talks with Israel. “The opposition will act at home to convince the government, but we can’t do that without Abbas and the Palestinians, our partners,” Shai stated.

Here, in the United States, members of Congress have expressed strong bipartisan opposition to one-sided efforts like the recent UNESCO votes. This past September, 88 [senators sent a bipartisan letter](#) to the president that reiterates support for a two-state solution through direct negotiations. The letter urges the president to continue insisting that a durable agreement can only be achieved at the negotiating table—and not at the U.N. The letter also urges a continued commitment to the longstanding U.S. policy to veto one-sided Security Council resolutions. While America stands behind Israel’s desire to reach a negotiated settlement, we must encourage our elected representatives to continue to stress that peace will only be possible when the Palestinians follow Abram’s lead and turn to peaceful negotiation to resolve their dispute with the Jewish state. ■