

OCTOBER 23, 2017

Parashat Lech Lecha

A Student of Abraham

And may they be blessed in you (Genesis 12:3)

ונברכו בך (בראשית יב:ג)

Reuven Shmerling loved people—all people. An Israeli resident of the settlement of Elkana, Shmerling owned a small factory in the neighboring Israeli-Arab town of Kfar Kasm and enjoyed strong, warm relationships not only within his own community, but in Kfar Kasm as well. Israeli educator Rabbi Chaim Navon wrote in a [Facebook post](#) that when Shmerling would see Arabs walking on the side of the road, he would stop and offer them a ride. When a family member convinced him that this practice was too dangerous to continue, he adopted another custom: every day he would take a bottle of frozen water from the freezer before he left for work, which he would give to the Arabs waiting to travel to work at the side of the road. This way, at least they would not be thirsty during the summer heat.

In his love for everyone, Shmerling followed in the path of our forefather Abraham, who saw the good and the positive potential in everyone. Rabbi Rafi Feurman [writes](#) that, “Abraham was full of love... He loved people, hundreds and thousands, and they followed him with great devotion.” Abraham also loved serving others, which is why he ran to greet his guests and serve them a meal in the hot desert sun. More than anything, it was this love that drew so many to Abraham and brought them closer to monotheism. The Mishnah in *Avot* (5:19) describes three attributes which define the “students of Abraham,” the first being a “good eye,” meaning the ability to see the positive in everyone and everything.

These values guided Reuven Shmerling in his daily life. These were the values that his family—his children and grandchildren—had gathered to celebrate over the Sukkot holiday as they marked his seventieth birthday. Sadly, they are also the values that they mourned and honored as they sat shiva after Reuven was brutally murdered in his factory in Kfar Kasm [in a terrorist attack](#) on the day before Sukkot.

Shmerling’s love for all people was universally recognized both inside his community and in the Arab town where he worked. It was due to his good nature and his strong relationships that dozens of Arab businessmen joined an Israeli-Arab delegation organized by MK Issawi Frej of the Meretz party together with MK Nissim Slomiansky of the Jewish Home party, which traveled the short distance to Elkana to pay to a shiva call to the grieving family. During the visit, Shmerling’s wife Hannah told the delegation, “Reuven would have been happy to see you here...He believed with all his might in true coexistence between fellow human beings.” Shmerling’s daughter Yonit, added that, “Abba always educated us that people are people, from both sides of the [Israeli-Arab] dispute, and this is how we must relate to them, despite our fear. We could have taken this episode to a place of hatred and anger, but today we choose together with you to take it to a place where it is possible to believe that [coexistence] is still possible.” Frej [noted](#), “Despite the ideological distance, geographic proximity is more important than all, and creates a shared life. For that, we are here. [Reuven] worked in Kafr Kasm, he did not talk about coexistence—he lived it.”

In the commandment to leave his homeland, God promises Abraham that, “in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (12:3) What is the meaning of this blessing? Rashi (on verse 3) explains that the simple meaning of this verse is that, “A man will say to his son, May you be like Abraham.” Tragically, we only learn about Reuven Shmerling because he was killed. Only in his death has the world learned just how much he followed in our forefather

Abraham's footsteps, as a student of Abraham whose "good eye" brought him to love all people, and to work towards positive coexistence in the state of Israel. ■

Standing on One Side of the River

And told Abram the Hebrew (Genesis 14:13)

ויגד לאברם העברי (בראשית יד:יג)

For decades, the United States and Israel have complained about the overt anti-Israel bias at the United Nations. This bias rears its ugly head most often in anti-Israel resolutions at both the General Assembly and at various U.N. organizations and bodies. The Palestinians, Arab states and their supporters have used these world fora to question Israel's existence and to isolate it politically; from the 1975 "Zionism is Racism" resolution to the more recent conferences on racism that have devolved into focused attacks on the Jewish state. This month, the United States took a stand in protest, declaring to the world that it will no longer abide the unrelenting Israel-bashing at the U.N. According to the [Washington Post](#), "The United States will withdraw from UNESCO at the end of next year, the State Department said...to stop accumulating unpaid dues and make a stand on what it said is anti-Israel bias at the U.N.'s educational, science and cultural organization." According to one State Department official the move, "sends a strong message that we need to see fundamental reform in the organization, and it raises everyone's awareness about continued anti-Israel bias."

As a nation, we have always been comfortable standing for our principals against the values of the entire world, from as early as the era of our forefather Abram, whom we read about in Parashat Lech Lecha. Abram—who would later be given the full name Abraham—was the first Hebrew, the name generally associated with the Jewish people. In the text of Lech Lecha, Abram is referred to specifically as an *Ivri*—a Hebrew. We read that after the capture of Abram's nephew Lot at the hands of a band of warlords, "And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew..." (Genesis 14:13) The term "Hebrew" or *Ivri* stems not from the language Abram spoke but instead from the ideological, religious and moral stand that he took against the population of the world at his time. Why was he called "Abram the Hebrew?" The Sages in the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 42) comment, "Rabbi Yehuda said: All of the world stood on one side while [Abram] stood on the other." While the entire world practiced paganism and worshipped idolatry, Abram had the fortitude to preach and teach against this practice in the name of God. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein [writes that](#), "the forefather of our nation teaches us that it is in the hands of man—if only he wishes it—to forge a path of his own... Even at a time when a person seems likely to give up in the face of the sweeping currents that roar and thunder before him, he knows that he can withstand them if he wishes to act..."

While UNESCO is far from the only United Nations organization that singles out Israel, it has served in recent months as an Israel-bashing body in a particularly callous and overt manner. It chose Yom Ha'atzmaut—Israel's Independence Day, to pass a resolution [denying Israel's historic claim to Jerusalem](#). Earlier this year UNESCO [designated the ancient city of Hebron](#)—the burial site of our forefather Abraham who we read about this morning, as a Palestinian world heritage site—while failing to acknowledge the deep Jewish connection to the ancient holy city.

As members of the pro-Israel community, we must applaud not only this recent decision by the White House, but also longstanding bipartisan congressional opposition, including the [unanimously passed Senate resolution](#) calling for an end to the anti-Israel bias in the U.N., which passed in April of this year. Calling the United States' decision to leave UNESCO a "courageous and moral decision," Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu noted that Israel planned to follow America's example and leave UNESCO as well. This month, the United States walked in the footsteps of our forefather Abraham, standing up to the international community in order to do what is right, and demand once and for all that the cynical abuse of the United Nations must come to an end. ■

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