

OCTOBER 30, 2017

Parashat Veyera

Preparing for the Future

Shall I hide from Abraham (Genesis 18:7)

המכסה אני מאברהם (בראשית יח:ז)

During a visit last week to Japan, Israel's Intelligence Minister Yisrael Katz urged the Japanese government to back President Trump's call to fix the deal with Iran, [reportedly](#) connecting the threat from the Islamic Republic to the pressing challenge of a nuclear-driven North Korea. "Japan, like Israel, stands on the front line against North Korea, as Israel stands on the front line against Iran," Katz said. "The lesson learned from North Korea is that it is forbidden to let a dictatorship obtain nuclear capabilities and Iran should be prevented from obtaining a missile ability that can threaten the region and the whole world." While the international community created short-term solutions that it thought allayed the nuclear threat from North Korea, the North Koreans continued planning and building their program all along. We must learn from our past. Today, America must develop a comprehensive, bipartisan strategy to deal with Iran's malign behavior and its quest for nuclear weapons.

This notion of planning for the long-term is found in our parashah as well. As soon as the three angels take leave of Abraham after their meal, God appears to Abraham to inform him of the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Why is Abraham privy to this critical decision? "And the Lord said: Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" (Genesis 18:17-18) This explanation requires explication: What is the connection between the fact that Abraham would "surely become a great nation" and the blessing that "all the nations shall be blessed in him?" (see 12:2)

Why does Abraham's blessing compel God to include him in the decision to destroy Sodom? Rabbi Yehudah Rock [writes](#) that the blessing isn't simply a promise for the future, but instead a task; a mission and destiny that Abraham would ultimately spread monotheism throughout the world. "God is explaining the revelation of His plans to Abraham not on the basis of His blessing to him, but rather on the basis of the mission and the destiny that he has entrusted to him...Abraham must be a full partner who is aware of the steps that God takes in the world towards the realization of this goal." Thus, because Abraham is focused not on a short-term project, but rather a long-term endeavor, every action Abraham takes matters. What happens to Sodom, and how Abraham reacts to the news, will invariably affect his ability to fulfill his ultimate mission.

The British military has an adage about planning called the "Seven P's." We'll clean it up and use six of the P's: "Proper Planning and Preparation Prevents Poor Performance." The adage is simple: Actions and reactions in the moment instead of preparation is a recipe for failure. On the other hand, when you create a plan, prepare for eventualities, and practice in the field, you dramatically increase your odds of success.

The United States [needs a comprehensive policy](#) to deal with Iran for the long-term, not only in the nuclear arena but also with respect to Iran's aggressive and dangerous behavior throughout the Middle East. Today, Iran is increasing its footprint on two of Israel's borders—Lebanon and Syria. The regime has a long-term plan, and has calculated that sacrificing ten years of uranium enrichment is but a small price to pay for hundreds of billions of dollars in sanctions relief, economic growth, the spawning of terrorist groups, and the development of ballistic missiles. We must urge

members of Congress to not only help curb Iran's behavior with bipartisan legislation today, but also to craft a comprehensive, bipartisan strategy that will allow us to address Iran's threatening behavior long into the future. ■

Acquiring the Foul Stench of Terror

And Lot sat in the gate of Sodom (Genesis 19:1)

ולוט ישב בשער סדום (בראשית י"ט:א)

One month ago, hundreds of representatives from the Palestinian Authority joined their Hamas counterparts in Egypt to [sign a long-anticipated unity agreement](#). This "reconciliation" could potentially put an end to over a decade of conflict between the two Palestinian factions. The agreement has endured for several weeks and implementation has begun, prompting Jordanian King Abdullah to [suggest](#) that the Egyptian-brokered agreement constitutes "an important step" for efforts to relaunch negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

If only it were that simple. Sadly, unless Hamas changes course, rather than promoting peace, the PA's reconciliation with the vicious terrorist group bent on the elimination of Israel will make peace far more difficult to achieve.

According to the Sages in the Midrash, after Lot left Abraham and moved to Sodom, he became influenced by their values and their wicked way of life. In the *Yalkut Shimoni* (on Genesis 19) we read: "This is the meaning of the verse: 'He that walks with wise men shall be wise; but the companion of fools shall smart for it' (Proverbs 13:20). 'He that walks with wise men,' to what is he compared? To a person who walks into a spice shop. Although he neither purchased nor sold, he nonetheless acquires a sweet scent. 'But the companion of fools shall smart for it,' to what is he compared? To a person who walks into a tannery. Although he neither purchased nor sold, he nonetheless acquires a foul stench. So do we find with Lot..." Lot originally followed in Abraham's path, using acts of kindness to bring the message of monotheism to the world. Once he settled into Sodom, fear of his neighbors' wrath put a stop to his spiritual endeavors, as Lot began to accept and adopt the wicked ways of his neighbors. Rambam teaches us that, "It is natural for a man's character and actions to be influenced by his friends and associates and for him to follow the local norms of behavior. Therefore, he should associate with the righteous and be constantly in the company of the wise, so as to learn from their deeds. Conversely, he should keep away from the wicked who walk in darkness, so as not to learn from their deeds." (*Laws of Attitudes* 6:1) Lot's tragic choice to associate with wickedness of Sodom destroyed his family and almost cost him his life.

Following the Palestinian reconciliation agreement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [issued a statement](#) which asked: "What does it say when you reconcile with a terrorist organization that seeks the annihilation of Israel; advocates genocide; launches thousands of rockets at civilians and digs terror tunnels; murders children; represses minorities; rejects international obligations; refuses to free Israeli civilians it holds hostage; refuses to return the bodies of Israeli soldiers to grieving mothers and fathers; tortures opposition [activist]; and mourns [al-Qaida leader Osama] Bin Laden's death? Reconciling with mass-murderers is part of the problem, not part of the solution." He [added](#), "There is nothing we want more than peace with all our neighbors. Reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas makes peace much harder to achieve."

While Israel wants peace, it cannot negotiate with a Palestinian government united with an armed faction devoted to its destruction. Hamas must agree to the Quartet Principles: Recognize the state of Israel; Abide by previous diplomatic agreements; Renounce violence as a means of achieving goals. Unless Hamas agrees to these terms, rather than serving as a fresh start, the agreement will cover the PA with the stench of Hamas and its terrorist tactics, making peace even more elusive. ■

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