

# Parsha Ponders

Lech Lecha | Nov 7, 2024 | 7 Tishrei 5785

## *Proclaiming the greatness of Hashem<sup>1</sup>*

ויאמר אברם אל-מלך סדם הרמתי ידי אל-יקוק קל עליון קנה שמים וארץ: אם-מחוט ועד שרוך-נעל ואם-  
אקה מכל-אשר-לך ולא תאמר אני העשרתי את-אברם

Avram said to the king of Sedom: “I raise my hand to Hashem, the Supernal G-d, the Owner of Heaven and Earth. I will take neither a string nor a shoe strap, nor anything that is yours, so you will not say that I made Avram rich”<sup>2</sup>

Avraham heroically rescued his nephew Lot who was kidnapped by the mightiest kings of the time. Simultaneously, Avraham rescued the king of Sedom. The king offered Avraham the spoils of the war, but Avraham vehemently refused. He announced he wouldn’t even take a string or a shoe strap from the spoils. Our Sages teach us<sup>3</sup> that in the merit of this proclamation, his children merited the *mitzvah* of the string of *techeiles* on their *tzitzis*, and the *mitzvah* of the strap of *tefillin*. How can we understand the *midah k’neged midah*, the measure for measure of this reward? Meaning, why did Hashem find these *mitzvos* to be an appropriate response to this act of piety? Rashi clarifies<sup>4</sup> that part of the merit was that Avraham didn’t want to benefit from theft, but what theft was there here? Avraham was the victor of the battle...

According to Jewish law, how can we understand the legal acquisitions of the spoils of war<sup>5</sup>? The mechanism is as follows. Everyone who engages in war is taking a chance that all of their belongings will be taken, lost, or destroyed. It’s quite likely they could lose it all, or at least a lot, even if they win the battle. It’s like gambling. Because everyone goes to battle with this subconsciously in mind, they can in fact acquire what they conquer, even more than they could have lost. The chance of loss is worth it in face of the chance of gain<sup>6</sup>.

However, this war was different. Avraham immediately sensed that he won the battle beyond the laws of nature. He didn’t have a large army, and he wasn’t an expert in warfare. Nevertheless, he miraculously triumphed against the mightiest of kings. He suffered zero losses, not incurring any damage. This is why Avraham said that he raises his hands to Hashem. He wished to indicate that this war had nothing to do with him, for according to the laws of nature he could not have been so successful. Hashem was the one who waged the war and Hashem was the one who won the war.

By stressing the string and the shoe strap Avraham was declaring that he suffered zero damage whatsoever, not even a string or a shoe strap of his was affected<sup>7</sup>. He continued by announcing that he would not take a thing from the spoils. Since he didn’t suffer any damage, Avraham felt it would be somewhat theft to take anything. Since this wasn’t normal circumstances, perhaps the laws of conquering and spoils didn’t apply<sup>8</sup>. He also didn’t want to benefit from miracles<sup>9</sup>. Avraham concluded

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<sup>1</sup> Based on [Maharil Diskin](#) to [Genesis](#) 14:23

<sup>2</sup> [Genesis](#) 14:22,23

<sup>3</sup> [Chullin](#) 88b-89a

<sup>4</sup> *Ad. loc.*

<sup>5</sup> [Gittin](#) 38

<sup>6</sup> Similar to what [Tosafos](#) to [Sanhedrin](#) 24b writes, that when there’s a chance of gaining a lot, it’s not considered *asmachta*, a case where it’s not acquired

<sup>7</sup> See [Isaiah](#) 5:27

<sup>8</sup> The [Maharil Diskin](#) for whatever reason didn’t speak this point out clearly

<sup>9</sup> See [Torah Temimah](#) *ad. loc.* § 19, who writes a similar point

that if the king of Sedom wanted to give everything as a gift, he absolutely refused, for he didn't want the king to say that it was he who made Avraham rich.

If so, we see just how far Avraham wanted to go to publicize Hashem's mightiness and glory in the world. He made sure everyone knew that it was Hashem who waged war for him, causing him the ultimate victory. He himself deserved no credit. Since Avraham publicized Hashem's Oneness and greatness to such an extent, it's no wonder then why he merited to the *mitzvos* of *tzitzis* and *tefillin*. It is said about *tefillin* that the nations will see it upon our heads and be petrified<sup>10</sup>. They will see the divinity of our *mitzvah*. As well, the *techeiles* of *tzitzis* is to remind us of Hashem's throne of Glory. Therefore, these *mitzvos* also declare Hashem's Oneness and greatness, just like Avraham. They were the perfect reward.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 28:10