

I LIFT MY HANDS

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Lech L'cha where Hashem commands Avrohom Avinu [the Patriarch, Abraham] to leave his country, birthplace and home, with the promise that he'll become a great nation.

The acts of the Forefathers serve as indications of what will unfold for their descendants throughout the map of their history. By scrutinizing their responses to different situations we gain an understanding of how we can best maneuver through the mazes that we will encounter.

Of the many events that transpire in this week's parsha, the one that struck me the most was the war that Avrohom fought.

"And it was in the days of Amraphel, King of Shinar, Aryoch, King of Elasar, Kdarlaomer, King of Ailam and Sidal, King of nations. [14:1]"

These four kings battled against five kings and even though they were outnumbered, they totally crushed them. Among the captives taken was Lot, Avrohom's nephew, who had been living alongside S'dom, one of the five nations that were beaten. When Avrohom was told of Lot's capture, he rallied his small group and bravely went to battle against this massive army of four powerful kings. Avrohom was victorious and he liberated not only Lot but also all the captives and property that had been taken.

The Ramban explains that these four kings represent the four kingdoms under whose dominion the Bnei Yisroel [Children of Israel] would be exiled. Shinar is actually Babylonia, the first exile that the nation experienced. Elasar, the Ramban writes, was probably part of the Medean/Persian Empire and Ailam a part of Greece, representing the second and third exiles. The last king, called the King of nations, represents the exile of Rome, more generally known as the exile of Edom, which is the exile we are presently in. His being called the King of nations brought to mind the 'melting pot' that is now leading a coalition in war...

Avrohom's victory over these kings represents the ultimate victory that Bnei Yisroel will have, sanctifying Hashem's Name and revealing the sovereignty that Hashem had hidden behind the mask of this world.

As always, Avrohom's actions and attitude serve as a guiding light for his descendants, so many generations later.

After his victory, Avrohom was approached by the King of S'dom. "Return to me my people (the captives that Avrohom had freed) and you can keep the property. [14:21]"

Avrohom's response was immediate and emphatic. "I lift up my hands to Hashem... if from a string to a shoe-strap" if I'll take from all that is yours. [14:22-23]"

The Talmud [Chulin 88B] teaches that in the merit of Avrohom's refusal to take even a string, his descendants, Bnei Yisroel, merited the mitzvah [commandment] of the strings of tzitzis. In the merit of his refusal of even a shoe-strap, Bnei Yisroel merited the straps of tefillin.

What is the connection between Avrohom's refusal to take spoils and these two mitzvos that Bnei Yisroel merited?

Rav Yehoshua Leib Diskin zt"l explains in the following way. Spoils of war are 'earned' as a result of the physical and material risks that one takes in battle. Avrohom recognized that his winning this war while suffering no losses whatsoever clearly showed the intimate involvement of Hashem's miraculous intervention.

Avrohom said: "I lift up my hands to Hashem..." realizing that his hands did absolutely nothing while Hashem had won the battle. Not even "a string to a shoe-strap" was lost.

Avrohom foremost desire was to publicize to the world Hashem's greatness and honor. Let it be known that it was Hashem who had fought and won this battle--not he. He showed this by taking no spoils--it wasn't my victory, I deserve no spoils.

As a result he merited that his descendants would have the two mitzvos of tzitzis and tefillin, signs worn outwardly that portray Hashem's greatness and power and our allegiance to Him.

The acts of the Forefathers serve as guiding lights for their descendants.

In the war of Gog Umagog [Armageddon] we will lift up our hands to Hashem, witnessing and acknowledging His greatness and honor.

Good Shabbos, Yisroel Ciner

This parsha-insights is dedicated to the memory and merit of Yisroel Shmuel ben Yaakov Yitzchak, z"l, an incredibly strong person whom I had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know through parsha-insights. In the sadness of our loss we can only lift up our hands and accept the will of Hashem.

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