

AVRAM LIFTED UP HIS HAND...SO THAT YOU NOT SAY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Lech Lecha

Avram Lifted Up His Hand...So That You Not Say 'I Made Avram Wealthy'

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 786, The On-Time vs. the Delayed Bris Good Shabbos

Parshas Lech Lecha contains an account of what truly may be called the "First World War." During this battle, Lot, the nephew of Avram, was captured and was subsequently rescued by Avram. The King of Sodom went out to greet Avram. As a gesture of gratitude for bringing about his rescue, the king told him "please leave me the people and take all the booty for yourself." Avram takes an oath ("I lift up my hand to Hashem, the G-d on High, who created Heaven and Earth") that he would not take even as much as a thread or a shoelace from the spoils of war so that the King of Sodom will not ever be able to say 'I made Avram wealthy'.

The Ramban interprets the "lifting of the hand to Hashem the G-d on High..." as more than just an oath (which is Rashi's interpretation). The Ramban explains that Avram was sanctifying any property that he might take to be "Hekdesh" (donated to G-d).

The Medrash writes that in the merit of Avram's not taking anything from the spoils of war, G-d granted his children the mitzvah of Tzitzis [corresponding to the string he did not take] and granted them the mitzvah of Yevamah [involving the taking off the shoe, corresponding to the lace of the shoe which Avraham did not take]. A second suggestion in the Medrash is that the Mishkan and the "Chut haSikra" surrounding the Mizbayach were given to Avram's descendants as rewards for this statement of his.

What was so significant about Avram's refusal to take part of the bounty that merited all these various rewards?

The Meshech Chochmah writes that Avram underwent a tremendous test here. He was waging war against the most powerful nations in the world. These were the nations that were just victorious in the epic battle of the "First World War." He was taking on the most powerful nations in the world with

a very small force of soldiers (and according to the Medrash, virtually single handedly). When emerging victorious from such a war, the natural reaction is to feel pretty good about oneself. It is all so tempting and easy to fall into the trap of saying "My might and the power of my hand has accomplished for me this great victory." (We are stronger, we are mightier, we are smarter, we have better tactics, etc.) It is almost impossible not to fall into that trap. If you examine the great battles of world history, that is the typical reaction when an army is victorious.

This unfortunately happened in Eretz Yisrael after the Six Day War. Everyone was amazed at the military prowess of the Israeli army and the Israeli air force. The mentality quickly took hold that "My might and the power of my hand accomplished for me this great victory." [Devorim 8:17]

Avram needed to do something dramatic to ensure that he would not fall into this trap. The Meshech Chochmah interprets the trust of Avram's statement to mean "It is not my booty because it was not my war and it was not my victory! G-d won the war, so - as the Ramban interprets - it is He who should get the spoils."

As an addendum to the Meshech Chochmah, I saw a beautiful thought in the name of the Gerer Rebbe - the Beis Yisrael. The simple reading of the pasuk is that Avram refuses to take the thread or the shoelace so that "You - King of Sodom - will not be able to say 'I made Avram rich'." The Beis Yisrael interprets differently. Avram lifted up his fingers and speaking to his own hand said: "You will not say 'I made Avram rich'!" He was not trying to negate a future claim by the King of Sodom, he was trying to negate the tempting claim of "My strength and the power of my hand, made for me this great wealth."

Whenever we are successful in life, it is so easy to fall into this trap. We need to lift up our hands and addressing the accomplishments of those very hands, say: "Don't get carried away and think that it was I who 'made Avram wealthy'."

The Connection Between Hagar's Pregnancy And That Of Shimshon's Mother

When Sarai saw that she and Avram were not able to have children together, she gave her handmaiden to Avram as a concubine so that he might have a child through her. The Torah tells us that when Hagar became pregnant, she treated Sarai with less respect. Sarai then caused her suffering until she fled from her. The Torah narrates that an Angel found Hagar in the wilderness and announced to her: "Heenach harah v'yaladet ben..." [Bereishis 16:11].

The simple interpretation of these words is that the Angel told Hagar that the pregnancy she was already aware of (as the Torah told us earlier) would result in the birth of a son and she should call that son Yishmael to commemorate the fact that G-d listened to her. Rashi, however, interprets the words "Heenach harah" to be a future prophecy. He explains that Hagar miscarried from her first

pregnancy, but the Angel told her that she should return and she would become pregnant again. Rashi cites the parallel expression used by the Angel, who spoke to the wife of Manoach (mother of Shimshon), where it clearly refers to a future pregnancy.

However, there is a difference between the pasuk in Shoftim and the pasuk in Lech Lecha. The pasuk in Shoftim really has no other possible interpretation because the Angel had just told her "You are sterile and have not given birth." However, the pasuk in Lech Lecha could certainly and perhaps more plausibly tolerate the interpretation "You are already pregnant." What forces Rashi to link the two pasukim?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky gives a very insightful interpretation. Rav Yaakov says that when the Gentiles devised the idea of an "Immaculate Conception," they based it on the pasukim in Shoftim. The Angel first told Manoach's wife "You are sterile". Then he told her "You are pregnant and will have a son." How did this happen? Five minutes ago she was told she could not have a baby. Now suddenly she is told that she is pregnant and will have a baby. What happened? It must be, said the Gentiles that this sudden pregnancy came about as a result of "Immaculate Conception". They argue that the wife of Manoach became pregnant from the Angel. That is why Shimshon had to be holy from the womb.

This is why Rashi emphasizes here that when an Angel tells a woman "Hinach Harah," it must mean that you will become pregnant in the future. The verb is only expressed in the present tense because when an angel says something it is "as good as done already." This interpretation therefore rejects the claim of the Notzrim that there is Biblical precedent for the concept of "Immaculate Conception".

With this approach, Rav Yaakov explains a very interesting passage in a Gemara in Bava Basra [91b]. The Gemara there asks the name of Shimshon's mother. (The Navi only refers to her as Manoach's wife). The Gemara answers that her name was Falfonis and also adds that the name of Shimshon's sister was Nachshan. The Gemara then asks, "What difference does it make?" and answers "It is a retort to the heretics." Rav Yaakov interprets that when the Notzrim will say that Shimshon was conceived via Immaculate Conception, we will now be able to respond that he had a sister whose name was Nachshan. We will sarcastically ask them: "Was she also conceived through Immaculate Conception?" We emphasize to them that Shimshon was conceived through normal male-female conception, as was his sister. This is the only way it has ever been done and let no one tell you otherwise!

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Lech Lecha are provided below:

Tape # 028 - Conversion (Geirus)

Tape # 070 - Bris Milah: The Metzizah Controversy
Tape # 119 - Conversion for Ulterior Motives
Tape # 166 - The Childless Couple in Halacha
Tape # 212 - Non-Jews and the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av
Tape # 256 - Mohel and Baby: Who Goes to Whom
Tape # 302 - The Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisroel
Tape # 346 - Trading Terrorists for Hostages
Tape # 390 - Geirus -- Mitzvah, Reshus, or Issur?
Tape # 434 - Anesthesia During Milah
Tape # 478 - Sandik -- Can You Change Your Mind?
Tape # 522 - Calling Avraham, Avrum
Tape # 566 - Learning Vs. Saving A Life
Tape # 610 - The Widow and the Divorcee - How Long Must they wait to remarry
Tape # 654 - Sonei Matonos Yichye - Refusing Gifts
Tape # 698 - Did the Avos Keep the Torah?
Tape # 742 - Can You Change Your Mazel?
Tape # 786 - The On-Time vs. the Delayed Bris
Tape # 830 - Standing for A Chosen and Kallah At The Chupah
Tape # 874 - Saving Some-One's Soul- How Far Must You Go?
Tape # 918 - Hidur Mitzvah - How Important?
Tape # 961 - Tying Shoes - Not As Simple As You Think
Tape #1005 - Inviting People to a Bris - Good Idea or Bad?
Tape #1049 - Honoring Your Wife
Tape #1092 - The Baal Teshuva Who Wants To Convert His Non-Jewish Girlfriend

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.