

## **I will not take so much as a thread or a sandal strap of what is yours; you shall not say, “It is I who made Avram rich.” (14:23)**

Avraham *Avinu* refused to accept any material gifts from the king of Sodom. He was not interested in the pagan patting himself on the back knowing that he had increased Avraham's wealth. Yet, we do not find this same attitude when Pharaoh offered gifts. Avraham readily accepted them. Furthermore, when Avraham had an incident with Avimelech, in which the king sought to assuage his guilt, he, too, gave Avraham gifts, which the Patriarch also accepted. Why did he refuse the gifts from the Sodomite king, yet accept the gifts proffered by Pharaoh and Avimelech? *Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, explains that actually Avraham refused to accept gifts from all three kings. Pharaoh and Avimelech's gifts, however, were different in the sense that they constituted compensation for their mistreatment of Sarah *Imeinu*. Thus, they never viewed their gifts as altruistic renderings, but rather, as a form of appeasement to assuage their guilt feelings. Indeed, in Avimelech's case, it was a sort of remuneration for Avraham's prayer in his behalf that he be healed from the plagues that were his well-deserved punishment.

Having said this, Avraham's acceptance of gifts from Avimelech and Pharaoh was actually a form of giving, since, by taking their gifts, he was basically granting them absolution for their revolting behavior. Indeed, using their own unique powers of deep insight, *gedolei Yisrael* are able to discern from whom to accept gifts and from whom not to.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* questions why, earlier in the *parsha*, Avraham comments that perhaps the Egyptians might give him presents when they leave. Even if he had had good reason to accept their "reparations," it should not have been something which he actively sought or to which he looked forward to receiving. This sounds inconsistent with the image of the Avraham *Avinu* that we have contrived up in our minds.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* cites the *pasuk* in *Chayei Sarah*, "And to the children of the concubines that were to Avraham, he gave gifts and sent them away (ibid 25:6)." *Rashi* explains that these were no ordinary gifts, but rather, everything that he received as a result of Sarah's stay in Egypt and Plishtim and other gifts, he gave them to them because he refused to derive any benefit from the pagans. Why did Avraham do this? The *Rosh Yeshivah* asks further: How could Avraham give his material possessions away to the children of the concubines? His material possessions, having first belonged to him, incurred a degree of *kedushah*, holiness, because they had served an *adam kadosh*, holy man. The material possessions of a holy person develop spiritual status as a result of their consecration for a higher purpose. This is all the more reason that Avraham certainly would not have wanted to share his possessions with the heathens.

This, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is the reason that Avraham sought Pharaoh's and Avimelech's gifts. He did not accept them for personal use. He knew that he would have to leave something for

the *bnei ha'plagshim*, and he refused to defile his consecrated possessions by giving them away to them. Thus, when he had the opportunity to benefit from Pharaoh and Sodom, he did so.