

## Then there came the fugitive and told Avram, the Ivri. (14:13)

Avraham *Avinu* was not the first righteous person to believe in and follow Hashem. He was the first one whom Hashem chose to be the progenitor of His great nation, *Klal Yisrael*. Shem ben Noach is referred to as a *Kohen l'Keil Elyon*, Priest to the G-d on High. That seems to be a distinguished reference. Yet, Hashem passed him over for Avraham. Why? Shem was always righteous. He assisted his father in building the *Teivah*, Ark, and devoted his life to solitude, removing himself from society. The problem is that after witnessing the destruction of humanity and spending an entire year immersed in acts of *chesed*, kindness, Shem continued business as usual. He did not change. He left the Ark in much the same way, on the same level, as when he had entered. He learned this way of life from his father, Noach, "who walked with G-d." He was a priest to G-d Above, and this is where Shem remained: above, out of touch, secluded, leaving no influence or impact on the world around him.

Hashem wanted someone who would be *korei b'Shem* Hashem, call out in the Name of G-d, who would declare his faith and reach out to the world and bring them closer to the monotheistic faith. Avraham lived within the world. He was a part of society. He understood people. Nonetheless, he remained Avraham the *Ivri*, which means on one side, opposite the rest of the world. He reached out to the world from his chosen side. He did not compromise his faith, his "side." He never wavered, because he was not on the same side as they were. Avraham cared about the world, about the people, praying for them, teaching them about Hashem. He was the pillar of kindness in a world where corruption and *middas Sodom*, characteristic of the evil of Sodom, was a way of life, but he did it all from his side – not theirs.

We derive a powerful lesson from this. We, his heirs, are *Ivrim*, a term which connotes opposite. It is important that we never waver in our commitment. Flexibility and outreach are critical, but never cross sides.

The combination of Avraham/Avram *Halvri* is written in the Torah but once – when our Patriarch gathered his students and went out to battle armies much greater than himself. He was the *Ivri* – on one side; one man opposite the world; a world opposing him at every step. He battled with Amrafel, the evil king whose goal was to spread his pagan beliefs to an unsuspecting world, and the king of Sodom, whose Draconian laws were undermining the development of a moral, ethical, decent society. Amrafel and Sodom were antagonists in a war that was destroying the world. They fought against one another, but they had one common enemy: Avraham. He was against idol worship, and he promoted lovingkindness. Neither one of those evil misfits had a place for him in their lives. Their agenda certainly did not include the likes of Avraham or his beliefs. Our Patriarch battled against this united evil which Amrafel and Sodom represented. How did he expect to win?

*Horav Moshe Neriyah, zl*, explains that Avraham was always alone against the world. He was acutely aware that his survival was dependent upon one factor: Hashem. He knew that, by the laws of nature, he did not have a chance of success. He understood that he was *Ivri* – on one side,

alone, against a world being devoured by paganism and immorality in which ethics and moral decency were taboo. Without Hashem, he had no chance. With Hashem, he had no competition.

This has been our legacy, bequeathed to us from the first *Ivri*. Yosef *HaTzaddik* followed suit; so did the *meyaldos*, Egyptian midwives, Yocheved and Miriam. They stood up for what was right and true. Thus, they are characterized as *Ivri*, *Ivriyos*. When we surrender to pressure – be it external, or even from our own liberal, progressive left who are prepared to undermine Jewish law in order to achieve acceptance and inclusion – we lose the characterization of *Ivri*. It is not enough to be a *Yehudi*: One must also be an *Ivri*, willing to stand alone and battle for Torah values.