

The King of Sodom said to Avram, “Give me the people and take the possessions for yourself...” If so much as a thread or a shoe strap; or if I will take from anything that is yours! So you shall not say, “It is I who have made Avram wealthy.” (14:21,23)

Avraham *Avinu* was the victor in the war, and to the victor go the spoils. The king of Sodom agreed to give him whatever material booty he requested, as long as he left the people. Avraham replied that he could keep his money: “Hashem has promised to make me rich.” As *Rashi* explains, “I do not need you to sustain me. Hashem takes care of His own. It is a nice speech, a wonderful and magnanimous gesture on the part of the Patriarch, but he was not receiving a gift from the king of Sodom. He was receiving the spoils of war, which, as victor, were rightfully his. The king was not making Avraham wealthy. The spoils belonged to Avraham by right. Indeed, the property no longer belonged to Sodom. The king lost it when he lost the war.

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, explains that Avraham is teaching us what should be the Jewish perspective on wealth – or any material bounty which we obtain. Avraham wanted that whatever he possessed would be derived directly from Hashem. This was Hashem’s promise to him. Thus, anything that remotely appeared as if Avraham had received it by force, as the victor of the war, no longer appeared as if it were coming directly from Hashem. This is despite the fact that, at every juncture, at every step of the war, Hashem had performed boundless miracles which allowed Avraham to have the upper hand and emerge triumphant. Nonetheless, Avraham only wanted that no one could ever conjecture that he had personally played a role in procuring this great fortune for himself. It had to be clear to every observer that it was Hashem’s doing – in fulfillment of His promise to Avraham.

From here, we glean insight into Avraham’s *mesiras nefesh*, dedication to the point of sacrifice. The king of Sodom was prepared to give him everything. At least he would have gladly remunerated him for his help in achieving victory. Yet, Avraham felt that by taking money from him, he would be minimizing the glory of Hashem. If Hashem had promised to make him wealthy, Avraham wanted to have this promise fulfilled in a revealed, overt manner, so that the entire world would recognize and acknowledge that it was all from G-d. If Avraham would have “participated” in the venture, if he would have performed the slightest endeavor, he felt that he would have detracted from Hashem’s glory. Now, everyone would see that Avraham’s wealth came – not due to Sodom; not due to Avraham – but only due to Hashem. I must add that Avraham was acutely aware that receiving money from the king of Sodom was concomitant to receiving it from Hashem. The money was just another of the Almighty’s many vehicles for processing His will. The people around him would not see it that way, and this is what concerned the Patriarch. He needed no instruction in believing in Hashem; the people, however, did.

Furthermore, *Rav* Gamliel notes the small-mindedness of the people of Sodom. Clearly, their victory was a miracle. Without Avraham, they would have lost everything – people and wealth. Yet, Avraham feared that if he were to take anything from Sodom, it would diminish *kavod Shomayim*, the honor of Heaven. This teaches us a crucial lesson: man cannot confront-- and certainly not concede to – his *afsius*, insignificance. Man's self-imposed arrogance does not allow him to see the achievements of others – especially when they are on his behalf.

An important practical lesson is to be derived from here. How often do we hear a benefactor boast about how he helped a poor fellow/family in need? It does not even have to be from a financial perspective – assistance of any kind which someone required, and he was there to help. The immediate attitude on the part of some (especially those who are seriously insecure or possess a high deficiency of self-esteem) is, “I helped so and so, I gave him his first start! I believed in him.” This is a Sodom-based attitude, in which it is all about “I.” A Torah Jew must realize that he is but a mere vehicle, an agent of Hashem, selected to be the medium for helping others. The wealth that he has accumulated is a Heavenly deposit until that time at which he is asked to share it with others. He should be filled with joy that Hashem has selected him for this mission. When we think it is all about us, we become like the people of Sodom – and we all are well aware of what eventually happened to them.