



## PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

RABBI YOAV DRUYAN

אם מחוט ועד שרוך נעל ואם אקח מכל אשר לך ולא תאמר  
אני העשרתי את אברם

*"I shall touch neither string nor shoelace from your spoils, so you shall not say, 'I have made Abraham wealthy.'"* (Genesis 14:23)

**W**hat could possibly motivate someone to refuse wealth?

Abraham's nephew, Lot, left Abraham's household and moved to Sodom. When the entire city fell to a group of four kings, Lot was subsequently captured. Coming to the aid of his nephew, Abraham waged war against the four kings and defeated them (Genesis 14:12-16). Laden with the spoils of battle, the king of Sodom (whom Abraham just saved) offered an exchange: "Take the material wealth, and I will take charge of the captives." Abraham refused, declaring that he wouldn't touch a drop of Sodom's wealth. Instead, he gave the king of Sodom both the spoils and the prisoners of war.

It might seem from this that Abraham disdained wealth. However, a later episode in Abraham's life suggests otherwise. When Abraham and Sarah went to Gerar (Genesis 20:1-18), Sarah was abducted and taken to King Abimelech's palace. G-d dealt severely with Abimelech's household, and the king begged Abraham to forgive him, offering him great wealth. This time, Abraham accepted the offer. So, did Abraham appreciate riches or not? In order to understand, let's take a look at the fundamentals of giving and taking.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler in his Treatise on Kindness speaks of two conflicting

forces: giving and taking. Most people are defined by one or the other, becoming primarily either "givers" or "takers." A taker may give, but it is usually a means to enable greater, more efficient taking — such as a dishonest seller giving a buyer a nice deal in order to establish good credentials, so that he can fleece others. Similarly, a giver may take in order to ultimately give more — such as a person who will take a handsome salary so he can give his family financial security.

There was a fundamental difference between Abimelech and the king of Sodom. Abraham, who epitomized loving kindness, responded to each accordingly.

Abimelech was truly desperate for forgiveness and sincerely wanted to give Abraham a gift to rectify his wrongs. He was a giver. By accepting his gift, Abraham was giving, in return, relief to Abimelech's conscience. The king of Sodom, though, was a taker. Offering Abraham the spoils was only a ploy — a win-win (or take-take) scenario. If Abraham declined the wealth, the king would have his money back. If Abraham accepted, the king would get bragging rights to helping such an illustrious

individual. It was to this overt "taking" that Abraham was vehemently opposed.

Each individual has to ask himself or herself: Where in the give and take spectrum do my own deeds fit in? When I give, do I harbor ulterior motives?

As the descendants of Abraham, and bearers of his legacy of kindness, let us strive for sincerity in our giving without thoughts of compensation or collateral.

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### WORD of the WEEK תמים

G-d commanded Abraham to circumcise himself and the men of his family and household. In the preamble to this commandment, G-d told Abraham, "Walk before Me and be *tamim* — perfect" (Genesis 17:1). Generally, the word תמים — *tam* means "complete," so that when G-d told Abraham to circumcise himself, He was telling him to complete himself physically through circumcision and spiritually through the covenant with G-d that circumcision represented (Radak, *Sefer Hashorashim*). Later, when the Torah commands every Jew to be "*tamim* with the L-rd, your G-d" (Deuteronomy 18:13), the meaning is similar: to be "totally or completely faithful" to G-d and not to rely on divination, magic, astrology or other superstitions (Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *The Living Torah*).

## Table Talk FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

G-d promised Abraham that he would have innumerable descendants, and they would inherit the Land of Israel. Abraham inquired how he would be sure that they would receive the Land. G-d responded by causing Abraham to fall into a deep sleep and then forging a covenant with him (*Bris Bein Habesarim* — the Covenant of the Parts). During this sleep, Abraham received a prophecy that inheriting the Land will follow a period of harsh exile (which later transpired in Egypt) (Genesis 15:7-21).

- נ) Abraham was a man of great faith who blindly followed G-d to destinations unknown. Why might he suddenly have doubted G-d?
- נ) Since this covenant was supposed to be a binding agreement between the parties involved, why might G-d have placed Abraham in a deep sleep?

### A QUESTION FOR THE RABBIS

Ovadiah was an Arab who had been raised as a Moslem but later converted to Judaism. He addressed the following question to Maimonides: Jewish prayers contain numerous references to the ancestors of the Jewish people: “our forefathers,” “our father Abraham,” and “G-d Who took our fathers out of Egypt.” Ovadiah asked whether he may say these prayers in their original version, since as a convert, he was not descended from Abraham, his ancestors were not the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jewish people, and his forefathers were never slaves in Egypt. Maimonides (*Letters of Maimonides*, No. 293, Blau Edition) responds to Ovadiah with great respect and love and addresses him with the title “master and teacher.” He answers that Abraham was not only the father of his *genealogical* descendants but also the father of his *ideological* descendants. Maimonides writes that anyone who has “taken shelter under the wings of the Divine Presence” and accepted the monotheism and Torah of Abraham is considered a child of Abraham and a member of his household. Maimonides therefore instructs Ovadiah to say the prayers and blessings in precisely the same way as every other Jew. He concludes by saying, “Do not take your genealogy lightly; although we trace our ancestry back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — you trace yourself back to the Creator, Who spoke and created the world.”

### HEY, I NEVER KNEW THAT

The Maharal of Prague (*Netzach Yisrael*, Ch. 11) notes that when G-d first spoke with Abraham, there was no introduction at all. The text in the Torah contains no statement about Abraham’s righteousness, no recounting of anything that he had done, and no mention of his greatness. There is a genealogical reference to Abraham in the previous chapter, but other than that, it is as though G-d speaks to him out of the blue. G-d’s first words to Abraham were a command to go to the Land of Israel and a blessing and promise that he would be the ancestor of G-d’s chosen Nation. The Maharal explains that had anything specific about Abraham been mentioned in the Torah prior to G-d’s choice of Abraham, it would have implied that G-d’s love for Abraham was dependent on that specific attribute, quality, or action. However, G-d’s love for Abraham and his descendants is “a love that is not dependent on anything specific” (*Avos* 5:16). It is a love that transcends specific attributes and actions, and hence is constant and eternal.



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