

## **And Avram said to the king of Sodom: I have raised my hand to Hashem, the supreme G-d, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will not take anything from you, even a string or a shoestrap. (14:22-23)**

Once the head of a school in Jerusalem came to the Satmar Rav and said, "Until now I have withstood the trial and refused all government funding. But expenses are growing higher, the institution is going into debt, and so the trial gets harder and harder all the time. How can I know if I will always be able to withstand the temptation?" The Rebbe replied, "You must constantly pray to Hashem that you should not take money from them. Perhaps you think it strange to pray for something that is your own

choice. But we find that Avraham Avinu offered just such a prayer. When he refused money from the king of Sodom, he said, 'I have raised my hand to Hashem.' The Targum of Onkelos explains, 'I have raised my hand in prayer before Hashem.'" Many years later, the head of that school said, "Ever since I heard those words from the Rebbe, I have been praying that I should withstand the trial, and my tefillos have been answered." (Toros V'uvdos Mibeis Raboseinu)



## **And the birds came down on the carcasses, but Avram chased them away. (15:11)**

Rashi explains that the birds symbolized David ben Yishai, and the carcasses symbolized the kingdoms of the nations of the world who, Avraham Avinu saw in this vision, would someday rule over the Jewish people during their exile. David ben Yishai would come to destroy those nations, but Hashem would not let him until the king moshiach comes. Avraham acted this out by not letting the birds devour the carcasses.

It seems that Rashi means David ben Yishai literally: that during his reign he would try to destroy the nations that would one day rule over the Jewish people. But we do not find that King David fought any nations besides the ones in his immediate surroundings – the Phillistines, the Amonites, the Aramites and so on. The nations that subjugated the Jewish people in exile – Bavel, Madai, Yavan, and Rome – were not powerful at that time. Furthermore, why should King David have thought that by fighting the nations in his time, he would prevent the Jewish people from going into exile years later? Surely David knew that if they would someday deserve exile,

Hashem would find a nation to carry out the task of exiling them. The Torah warns, "Hashem will bring upon you a nation from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you do not understand."

The Abarbanel explains that Rashi means not King David, but his descendant, the moshiach. Moshiach will come and try to destroy the nations, but Hashem will not let him until the time comes. Actually, preventing moshiach from coming too early was Avraham's own initiative. In the Abarbanel's own words: "Avraham foresaw the length of this exile and the great misfortunes it brought, and he feared that his descendants would rise up to leave the exile before the time set by Hashem, just as the children of Ephraim left the Egyptian exile before the time, whereupon Hashem became angry at them and killed thousands of their best. So Avraham, knowing the time of the End, chased away the birds – the son of David – preventing them from coming down on the carcasses – the nations – until evening, i.e. the time of redemption and the end of

exile, as it says, 'And at the time of evening there will be light.'

"And there is no doubt that it was in reference to this that Shlomo said (Shir Hashirim 2:7), 'I have adjured you, daughters of Jerusalem, with the deer and the hinds of the field, that you not awaken nor arouse the love before it desires.' And in Kesubos 111a, 'Rabbi Yossi bar Chanina said: To what to these three oaths refer? One, that Israel should not go up as a wall. One, that the Holy One, blessed is He, adjured Israel not to rebel against the nations of the world. One, that the Holy One, blessed is He, adjured the nations not to subjugate Israel too much.' The prohibition on 'rebellious against the nations' means that we must bear the yoke of the exile and live under them until the time of the End, when they will pass on. And this is what the prophet Tzefaniah meant when he said (3:8), 'Therefore wait for Me, said Hashem, for the day when I arise,' i.e. He commands them to wait until the time of the End, and not rebel and leave the exile before the time set by Him." (Yeshuos Meshicho v. 1, p. 11b)

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# Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

## **And Hashem said to Avram after Lot had separated from him: Lift up your eyes and see from the place where you are, north and south and east and west. (13:14)**

Rashi comments that Hashem waited to speak to Avram until the wicked Lot had left. An editor of Rashi's commentary adds in parentheses that at the beginning of the parsha Hashem did speak to Avram although Lot was with him, because at that time Lot was good. The question is: what did Lot do to become "wicked" in such a short time?

The Torah relates several pesukim earlier (13:7), "And there was a quarrel between the herdsmen of the Avram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle, and the Canaanite and the Perizite were then living in the land." Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains that Lot's herdsmen were letting their cattle graze on other people's land. When Avram's herdsmen rebuked them for this, they replied that the land had already been given to Avram, and Lot was his heir. But the Torah tells us the truth: the Canaanite and the Perizite were still living in the land, and the time had not yet come for Avram to get it. Avram then said to Lot, "Separate from me," and Lot went to live near Sodom. We must ask: why did Avraham, who was so wealthy, have to separate from his relative over such a petty monetary issue? The answer is, Avraham was not bothered by the money, but by Lot's dangerous reasoning. Avraham knew that although Hashem had promised to give Eretz Yisroel to his seed, the actual fulfillment of the promise had to be prompted by a Divine command, given through a prophet. Yehoshua's conquest, the building of

the First Temple, and the return to the Second Temple in Ezra's time were all mandated by specific prophecies. In our time as well, we must wait for Eliyahu Hanavi; until then any attempt to take the land is forbidden under the Oaths. Foreseeing all this, Avraham saw no alternative but to stay as far as possible from Lot and his wrong view, in order to set an example for his progeny in all times. This is why Hashem only spoke to Avraham after Lot had left him.

With this in mind, we can explain another difficulty. In the story of Eliezer going to betroth Rivka, Rashi mentions in two places (24:10,32) that Avraham's camels wore muzzles so that they should not graze in other people's fields. But in the Midrash, there is actually a dispute about this. One view held that Avraham's camels did not need muzzles; they were careful on their own not to steal the grass. Weren't Avraham Avinu's camels at least as good as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair's famous donkey, who refused to eat forbidden food? The Midrash does not tell us what the other side of the dispute, who held that they did wear muzzles, replied to this argument. And Rashi prefers the opinion that they wore muzzles, so he must also have had a reply.

The answer is that certainly Avraham Avinu was greater than Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, and his animals would not eat forbidden food. But after the episode with Lot, Avraham realized that he lived in a dangerous time, when the yetzer hara to take

possession of Eretz Yisroel before the time was especially strong. In such a time, one must take extra precautions, to stay as far as possible from anything that resembles taking the land from its current owners.

Chazal tell us (Avodah Zarah 14b) that Avraham Avinu had a tractate on idolatry that contained 400 chapters, while ours has only five. How did all those laws go lost? The answer is that in ancient times, the yetzer hara of idolatry was very strong; it was the main yetzer hara of the times. Therefore, it presented itself in many different forms, in order to tempt people. Avraham Avinu lived in a world full of idolatry. In whatever area of life one looked, there was always some connection to idolatry. In order to combat this, he needed many more laws. But when Chazal wrote our tractate Avodah Zarah, that inclination had been diminished by the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah to a shadow of its former size. There was not so much idolatry in the world, so it could be covered in only five chapters. In the same way, in our generation the yetzer hara to take possession of Eretz Yisroel before the proper time is the prevailing yetzer hara of the times. Wherever one looks—news, business, music, language, advertisements, yeshivos, Chassidus, seforim, mitzvos – one meets up with this yetzer hara. In such a time, one must follow Avraham Avinu's example and take special precautions to stay far away from all such things. (Divrei Yoel, pp. 317-321)