



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת a collection of maamarim on  
תנא דבי אליהו given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

### Melave Malka Parshas Lech Lecha 5763

In Parshas Lech Lecha many *meforshei hapshat* point out the discrepancy between Avraham Avinu's approach to receiving gifts from Pharaoh, as opposed to his response to the King of Sdom's offer of gifts later in our parsha.

Before travelling to Mitzrayim, Avraham tells Sarah אִמִּי נָא אֲחֹתִי אֶתְּ לִמְעַן יִיטֵב לִי בְּעַבְדֶּיךָ וְחַיְתָּה נַפְשִׁי בְּגִלְדֶּךָ (Please say that you are my sister so that they will do good to me because of you, and I will live because of you). When Avraham's prediction comes true, the Torah describes the lavish gifts of sheep, donkeys, cattle, manservants and maidservants that he accepts from Pharaoh. In contrast, he responds to the King of Sdom's offer by saying אִם מְחוּט וְעַד שָׁרוֹךְ נֶעַל וְאִם אֶקַּח מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ וְלֹא תֹאמַר אֲנִי הִעֲשֵׂרְתִּי אֶת אַבְרָם (From a thread to a shoelace, I will not accept anything of yours and you will not say 'I made Avram rich').

B'pashtus, it's possible to explain the difference with a *chiluk* that contains a vital lesson for each and every one of us. When Avraham travelled to Mitzrayim, he was a *ba'al chov*, he owed money. We know this because Chazal explained the Torah's description of his return trip, וילך למסעי (He went on *his* travels), that he went to return money to those who had given him things on credit.

Someone who owes money can't base his decisions on *chumros* and *tzidkus*. He cannot allow himself the luxury of refusing gifts. A person with debts is obligated to repay them. However, once Avraham Avinu became wealthy, he was entitled to choose path of *יחיה* (One



[1]  
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who hates gifts, lives). At that point, his decision to refuse gifts wouldn't harm anyone else.

There is much to learn from Avraham Avinu's approach. First and foremost, when a person has debts, he cannot allow himself the luxury of *chumros* that will impede his ability to repay those debts. Shlomo Hamelech says in Mishlei, עבד ליה לאיש מלוה, (A borrower is a servant of the one who lent him money). One who owes money, is required to work as hard as he can in order to pay back those who lent him money.

However, the lesson also applies to many other areas of life. It is forbidden to adopt *chumros* that will cause loss or inconvenience to others. There is a saying that one who is *machmir* is often saying "מאך מי" (Do for me). If someone wants to be *machmir*, may he be blessed! However, that *brachah* doesn't apply when he *chas v'shalom*, adopts *chumros* that burden and inconvenience others.

After the passing of Hagaon Harav Shach zt"l, I heard a story about a well know Rosh Kollel who asked the Rav's advice regarding the behavior of a young man in his Kollel. The Rosh Kollel noticed that this *avreich* seemed very distracted, so he asked him what was bothering him. The young man replied that his wife had recently begun to teach in a school that was far from their home. She now had to wake up before dawn in order to prepare everything their children needed for their school day. He told his Rosh Kollel that his wife was having difficulty handling the burden of her new schedule.

When the Rosh Kollel asked his student why he didn't help her, he explained that he was unable to wake up early because he was always immersed in Torah study until well after midnight. The Rosh Kollel instructed him to stop learning so late at night and to go to sleep earlier so that he could get up and help his wife.

Rav Shach told the Rosh Kollel that the young man had actually come to him in order to complain about that decision. Rav Shach told the *avreich*



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that he fully supported the Rosh Kollel. “Aren’t you a *baal chov*?”, asked Rash Shach, “In the *kesuva*, you obligated yourself to serve, honor, and support your wife in the way of Jewish husbands. It is forbidden for you to undertake *chumros* and *hidurim* of *hasmadah* that negatively impact others, especially your wife.”

This lesson obligates all of us to weigh our actions carefully. On one hand, it can be praiseworthy to adopt safeguards and *chumros* that protect us from transgression. On the other hand, even noble spiritual aspirations don’t give us license to burden others or cause them to lose out.

The *zechus* of emulating *Avraham Avinu* in this way will enable us to follow his path in all areas, serving Hashem Yisbarach wholeheartedly every day of our lives, **אמן כן יהי רצון**



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