

# *The Cost of Miracles*

PARSHA INSIGHTS - LECH L'CHA (5760)

## **A MIRACLE WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED**

“After these events, the word of Hashem was to Avram in a vision, saying, ‘Do not fear, Avram; I am a shield for you, your reward is very abundant’” (15:1). *Rashi*, from the *Midrash Rabba*, clarifies: This dialogue occurred right after a miracle was performed for him - he succeeded in slaying the kings during the dreadful war. Why did he need reassurance? He was concerned that maybe he had received so much kindness from Hashem, he had consumed the reward originally intended for him for all his righteous deeds. (The promise not to be afraid informed him that he would not be punished for having killed the opposing soldiers during battle.) As for his concern that all his merits were terminated because of the wonders performed for him, Hashem declared that his reward would still be very significant. It was unaffected by the supernatural treatment he had received.

There is something perplexing here. In general, someone who is saved by a miracle loses some of his merits. He has “spent big money,” so his account has been depleted somewhat. *Chazal* [our Sages] express this in the *Gemara Shabbos* 32A: “A person should never stand in a place of danger and assume that a miracle will be done for him. Perhaps a miracle will not be performed for him! **And if Hashem creates a miracle for him, his merits are decreased.**” It is derived from Yaacov *Avinu* [Jacob our forefather] in *Parshas Vayishlach*, where he feared that his good standing had been diminished because of all the *nisim* [miracles] Hashem wrought for him.

If so, how could it be that Avram’s merits were NOT reduced as the result of the miracles done for him? Why should Avram be an exception? Rav Zalman Sorotzkin provides a solution. When a person’s life is threatened, G-d forbid, because of his sins, sometimes Hashem uses a genuine miracle to deliver him. Since the hardship came upon him as a result of his wrongdoings, the ensuing miracle causes his *zechuyos* [merits] to be diminished. He needed to rely on some of his past *mitzvos* [good deeds] to save his life!

However, the difficulties experienced by Avraham were for an entirely different purpose. “Our forefather Avraham WAS TESTED WITH TEN TRIALS, and he withstood them all - to show the degree of our forefather Avraham’s love for G-d” (*Avos* 5:4). These tribulations were not designed to discipline Avraham for transgressions, as we see from the *Mishna* in *Avos*. Rather, they forged an everlasting bond between Avraham and Hashem, which carried over to his progeny. These trials merely proved Avraham’s allegiance to his Creator. When he was freed from peril through a miracle, as in today’s *parsha* [Torah portion], his merits were not lessened. The original travail was not for the sake of punishment, rather to challenge his loyalty. Therefore, the miracle required to release him did not take away from his *zechuyos*.

For this reason, Hashem proclaimed that despite the miraculous salvation Avram underwent, his merits were totally intact. This is reassuring to many of us who have witnessed obvious miracles. Our *mitzvah* [good deed] credit has not necessarily suffered, if the *nisim* were to rescue us from hardships that were intended as trials, not for the purpose of rebuke. (Of course, life itself is an ongoing miracle, as we have discussed before. The meaning of “miracle” in today’s *d’var Torah* [lesson] is “overt, conspicuous miracle”. This refers to an event totally out of the “ordinary”, although the ordinary is also a great wonder.)

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