

“AND AVRAHAM HEARD THAT HIS BROTHER WAS TAKEN CAPTIVE,
AND HE LED HIS TRAINED MEN...” (BEREISHIS 14:14)

AVRAHAM'S NEPHEW, Lot, had been taken prisoner by four mighty kings when they conquered Sodom. Informed of his nephew's desperate plight, Avraham immediately set out with 318 trained men, fearlessly trusting in Hashem's Divine intervention to enable his small group to defeat the four powerful armies and thus free Lot from imprisonment.

Avraham prepared his men for the challenge

Before they went to battle, Avraham prepared his men for the challenge. The *gemara* (Nedarim 32a) teaches us that he fortified his men with gold and precious stones so that they would not stop to indulge in the spoils of war, but rather continue in their efforts to save Lot's life. It seems clear from Avraham's precaution that had he not lined his men's pockets with money and jewels they would have stopped in the midst of their military campaign to partake of the booty, neglecting the captive Lot to fulfill their own desires.

Avraham's soldiers were not mere local mercenaries

Avraham's soldiers were not mere local mercenaries. They were the *talmidim* of our great forefather, who had brought them close to Hashem. These men were *ba'alei bitachon* of sufficient spiritual caliber to go into battle against a powerful alliance that represented the world's military superpowers. Although they faced grave danger, they accompanied Avraham, unshakable in their faith that Hashem's miraculous assistance would grant them success in freeing Lot. Is it possible that such *tzadikim*, willing to risk their lives to perform the *mitzvah* of *pidyon shvuyim*, would abandon their mission and leave Lot to languish in prison as they plundered the spoils of battle?

Apparently, Avraham realized that human nature is to focus one's concentration on the immediate objective and lose sight of the ultimate goal. While these men set out with holy intentions to save Lot, they would have become caught up with the particular battle they were fighting, and less aware of their overall purpose. Once the urgency of their mission had been shifted out of the spotlight of their consciousness, the glitter of gold would now attract their attention. By providing them with wealth at the start of this campaign, Avraham protected his men from the allure of the booty so their minds were able to refocus and reassess their true purpose.

We must be careful to frequently refer to our map and our compass

When we make a decision to take action, even with holy intentions and for a *mitzvah* as great as saving a life or freeing a prisoner, we must be ever vigilant to remain focused on our ultimate goal. As with life itself, there will certainly be many details to become involved and distracted with, and we can lose the feeling of immediacy and urgency that propels us to complete our mission. Being aware of this vulnerability, we must be careful to frequently refer to our map and our compass – the Torah – so that we stay on course. If we constantly recheck and remind ourselves why we are here and what our ultimate purpose is, our endeavors will surely be blessed with success.