

Date: 9 Cheshvan 5786 (October 31, 2025)

Torah Portion: Lech Lecha

Topic: The Humility of Abraham

As it is written (Genesis 14:3): “All these had joined at the Valley of Siddim, which is the Salt Sea.” The Valley of Siddim was called by three names: the Valley of Siddim, the Valley of Shaveh, and the Valley of Succoth.

The Midrash explains: it was called the Valley of Siddim because it produced large trees that were used to manufacture chopping boards. Alternatively, it was called the Valley of Siddim because it was made up of many hoeings, as the valley was consistently plowed, creating numerous furrows lined with mounds of dirt turned over by the plough.

It was called the Valley of Shaveh because it was there that all the nations of the world agreed to coronate Abraham as their king. Until that time, all the kingdoms had been antagonistic toward Abraham and sought to have him killed. But once Elohim gave him a miraculous victory over the four mighty kings, the survivors of the war gathered in the valley to make peace and to coronate him. The Valley of Shaveh (Agreement) was called the “king’s valley” because the agreement reached there was to coronate Abraham as king.

Therefore, they cut down some cedar trees and made a large platform out of them for Abraham, placed him on top of it, and began declaring praises before him, saying, “Hear us, my lord: You are a prince of Elohim in our midst!” They said to him, “You are a king over us, you are a prince over us, you are a mighty one over us!” But Abraham said to them, “Let the world not lack its true King! And let the world not lack its true Elohim!”

Abraham was praised as fulfilling the roles of both a king and a prince. A king has absolute authority over, and responsibility for, his subjects, but he generally delegates the task of caring for his subjects to a prince who serves beneath him. Thus, when Abraham is praised as both king and prince, this means that although he had the authority of a king, he still personally responded to the needs of his subjects. They then praised him as a mighty one as well, meaning either that he had the divine inspiration of prophecy or that Elohim made him His agent to lead the world.

Even when Elohim bestowed greatness and prominence upon Abraham in the eyes of men, he regarded it as nothing and attributed all greatness and authority to Elohim. The only greatness Abraham desired was to be held in esteem by Elohim, and even then, he recognized that all he had attained spiritually was derived from Him. Elohim endowed Abraham with the power of prayer and blessing; yet even when he exercised that power, as when he prayed for the people of Sodom, he acknowledged, “Behold, now, I desired to speak to my Adonai, though I am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). Such was Abraham’s lofty level of humility.

And it was called the Valley of Succoth because it was covered over by trees. R’ Tanchuma said: specifically, it was covered with grapevines, fig trees, pomegranate trees, walnut trees, almond trees, apple trees, and peach trees. These trees have abundant foliage and thus shaded the valley.

Finally, the verse identifies “the Valley of Siddim” as “the Salt Sea,” even though the former was the site of a battlefield. The Midrash explains: originally, at the time of the battles, there was nothing in the Valley of Siddim but a small channel of salt water, but subsequently the nearby streams overflowed their banks, flooding the valley and forming a sea. Thus, it is written, “He broke open streams in the rocks” (Job 28:10).

Shalom.