

OHRNET

PARSHAT LECH LECHA 8 CHESHVAN , 9 NOVEMBER 2024

• VOL 32 NO. 2

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Evoking a Blessing

“And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” (12:2)

A trip down memory lane: One of the more interesting reactions to Gilad Shalit's release from more than five years of incarceration in Gaza was a tweet from an Arab in Syria who said that the Israelis were prepared to give up 1,000 people to save one life, but their government treated its citizens' lives as though they were worthless.

The Jewish People are very often held to a higher and double standard.

In this case, we ourselves held ourselves to a higher standard. If nothing else, Shalit's release showed the world the sanctity with which the Jewish nation prizes human life and freedom.

“And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”

The above sentence is part of the first recorded communication between Hashem and man. The beginning of the relationship. As it is the beginning, these words must also contain the essence of that relationship. For all beginning contains essence. A seed is not just the beginning of an oak, it is also its essence.

When Hashem spoke to Avraham, He promised him many things: that he would be a great nation, that he would be blessed and that his name would be made great. However, all of this was predicated on a single condition — that Avraham would be a reason for people to bless Hashem. This was to be the essence of the relationship between Hashem and man. That through his every action, man would sanctify Hashem's name. That he would bring a blessing to the lips of the world.

Our actions are scrutinized by the world. If we are held to a higher — and sometimes double — standard, whether as individuals or as a nation, it is because the world recognizes subconsciously that our job in this world is “to be a blessing,” to sanctify Hashem's name.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 14)

UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”
(Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah then continues with chapter 121 of Tehillim: “A song to the ascents. I raise my eyes to the mountains; from where will come my help? My help is from Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to falter, your Guardian will not slumber. Behold, He neither slumbers nor sleeps; the Guardian of Israel. Hashem is your Guardian. Hashem is your Shadow at your right hand. By day the sun will not harm you, nor the moon by night. Hashem will protect you from every evil; He will guard your soul. Hashem will guard your departure and your arrival, from this time and forever.”

Chapter 121 is slightly different from the other similar chapters of Tehillim that begin with the words “Shir Hama’alot – A Song of Ascents.” There are fourteen chapters of Tehillim that open with the words “Shir Hama’alot,” but there is only one chapter that begins with the words “Shir Lamaalot – A Song to the Ascents.” The Midrash (Shocheh Tov) explains that our chapter of Tehillim is referring to the moment when we, the Jewish nation, will ascend Har Tzion – Mount Zion – to judge Eisav and his descendants for everything they have done to us throughout the generations. As the Prophet Ovadiah so stirringly declares (1:21), “And the saviors will ascend Har Tzion to judge the Mountain of Eisav, and the kingdom will be Hashem’s.”

Abarbanel writes that it will be on that extraordinary day that the entirety of mankind will recognize Hashem as the true King, and they will unreservedly accept His authority.

However, it is the sixth verse, “By day the sun will not harm you, nor the moon by night,” that is the reason for chapter 121’s inclusion in Kiddush Levanah. The sun is Hashem’s “caressing smile, bringing us energy and health. The previous verse states, “Hashem is your Shadow”. According to the Midrash, we are being taught that just as our shadows mimic us precisely, so too Hashem relates to us exactly as we relate to others. If we allow ourselves to be “Shadowed” by Hashem, we will not be harmed by the sun. If we allow ourselves to light up the lives of others, Hashem will light up our lives.

This thought is expressed in the beautifully poetic words of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, called “The Importance of a Smile”: “A smile costs nothing, but gives much. It enriches those who receive, without making poorer those who give. It takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it, and none is so poor but that he cannot be made rich by it. A smile creates happiness in the home,

fosters good will in business and is the countersign of friendship. It brings rest to the weary, cheer to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad and is nature's best antidote for trouble. Yet, it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away. Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours, as none needs a smile so much as he who has no more to give!"

While the sun is the source of heat and life in our world, it is also true that the sun can be destructive. Its power can be harnessed for the benefit of mankind, and it can, just as equally, be a source of enormous destruction. Whether we allow "Hashem's smile" to illuminate our lives or not is dependent entirely on us.

And, in the same way, Hashem will protect us at night. Rabbi Hirsch explains that the sun and the moon correspond to two formidable dangers each Jew in exile struggles with. The light of the sun is analogous to the spiritually debilitating effects of enormous success. A person can easily be "blinded" by their dazzling accomplishments, leading them to imagine that their achievements are attributable to themselves alone and not to Hashem. Night, on the other hand, represents the darkness of exile. The absence of light symbolizes persecution and the endless hatred that we have been surrounded by forever. It can cause a person to despair and to lose sight of Hashem. But, within the gloom, the moon spreads its gentle light, dispelling the fear and the uncertainty, and reflecting Hashem's comforting Presence within the darkness.

As Rabbi Hirsch writes, "If you are faithful to Hashem, He will dispel the sorrow of exile for you, just as the moon brings light to the darkness. Additionally, He will protect you so that the 'sun' of the foreign, external cultures and opulence will not blind you."

To be continued...

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions, POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email: info@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller - Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, Mrs. Helena Stern.

©1992-2024 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved - This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Editor's disclaimer - Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to be a source for halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified halachic authority for ruling.

Questions

1. What benefits did G-d promise Avraham if he would leave his home?
2. "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." What does this mean?
3. Who were the souls that Avraham and Sarah "made"?
4. What were the Canaanites doing in the Land of Canaan when Avraham arrived?
5. Why did Avraham build an altar at Ai?
6. What two results did Avraham hope to achieve by saying that Sarah was his sister?
7. Why did Avraham's shepherds rebuke Lot's shepherds?
8. Who was Amrafel and why was he called that?
9. Verse 14:7 states that the four kings "smote all the country of the Amalekites". How is this possible, since Amalek had not yet been born?
10. Why did the "palit" tell Avraham of Lot's capture?
11. Who accompanied Avraham in battle against the four kings?
12. Why couldn't Avraham chase the four kings past Dan?
13. Why did Avraham give ma'aser specifically to Malki-Tzedek?
14. Why didn't Avraham accept any money from Sodom's king?
15. When did the decree of 400 years of exile begin?
16. What did G-d indicate with His promise that Avraham would "come to his ancestors in peace"?
17. How did G-d fulfill His promise that Avraham would be buried in "a good old age"?
18. Why did the Jewish People need to wait until the fourth generation until they returned to Eretz Canaan?
19. Who was Hagar's father?
20. Why did Avraham fall on his face when G-d appeared to him?

Answers

1. 12:1 - He would become a great nation, his excellence would become known to the world, and he would be blessed with wealth.
2. 12:3 - A person will say to his child, "You should be like Avraham."
3. 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of G-d.
4. 12:6 - They were in the process of conquering the land from the descendants of Shem.
5. He foresaw the Jewish People's defeat there in the days of Yehoshua due to Achan's sin. He built an altar to pray for them.
6. 12:13 - That the Egyptians would not kill him, and would give him presents.
7. 13:7 Lot's shepherds grazed their flocks in privately owned fields.
8. Amrafel was Nimrod. He said (amar) to Avraham to fall (fel) into the fiery furnace.
9. 14:7 - The Torah uses the name that the place would bear in the future.
- 10.14:13- He wanted Avraham to die trying to save Lot so that he himself could marry Sarah.
- 11.14:14 - His servant, Eliezer.
- 12.4:14 - He saw prophetically that his descendants would make a golden calf there, and as a result his strength failed.
- 13.14:20 - Because Malki-Tzedek was a kohen.
- 14.14:23 - G-d had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn't want Sodom's King to say, "I made Avraham wealthy."
15. With the birth of Yitzchak.
- 16.15:15 - That his father, Terach, would repent and become righteous.
- 17.15:15 - Avraham lived to see his son Yishmael repent and become righteous, and he died before his grandson Esav became wicked.
- 18.15:16 - They needed to wait until the Amorites had sinned sufficiently to deserve expulsion.
- 19.16:1 - Pharaoh.
- 20.17:3 - Because he was as yet uncircumcised.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

The Princess' Gaze (Part 1/2)

From the moment that Abraham's wife is introduced in Genesis 12:29 and for the next five and a half chapters, her name is always given as Sarai (17 times). In Genesis 17:15, Hashem tells Abraham that his wife Sarai's name should no longer be Sarai, but rather Sarah. From then on through the rest of the book of Genesis, she is consistently referred to as Sarah (thirty-eight times). The only other time her name appears again in the Bible is in Isaiah 51:2, when the prophet Isaiah exhorts the Jewish People to remember their forebears, Abraham and Sarah. In this essay we will discuss the names Sarai and Sarah borne by of Abraham's wife.

Both names, Sarai and Sarah, are related to the word sar ("prince/officer/minister") and denote the princeliness and prominence of Abraham's wife. Even though those names, as well as the word sar, are typically spelled with an initial SIN-REISH, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim in Cheshek Shlomo traces the word sar to the biliteral root SAMECH-REISH (based on the interchangeability of the letters SIN and SAMECH). He explains the core meaning of that root to refer to "removal" (i.e., moving something away from its original place or position), and a corollary of that core meaning is the idea of asirah ("jailing/incarcerating"), which removes a prisoner's freedom of movement. The way Rabbi Pappenheim explains it, the word sar derives from this branch of the SAMECH-REISH root because a sar uses his position of authority to limit his subordinates' movements and dictate how they may or may not act.

If both Sarai and Sarah are related to sar, then what is the difference between them and what is the significance of Hashem changing the name of Abraham's wife?

The difference between the names Sarai and Sarah is that the former is spelled with a YOD as the final letter, while the latter is spelled with a HEY as the final letter. There are two rabbinic traditions regarding the YOD which was taken away from the name Sarai. One tradition states that the YOD (which holds a gematria value of ten) was split in twain resulting in two HEYs (each of which holds a gematria value of five). Then, one HEY was given to Abraham (to switch his name from Avram to Avraham), and the other HEY was given to his wife (to switch her name from Sarai to Sarah).

The other tradition relates that when Hashem removed the letter YOD from Sarai's name, the letter complained to Him, arguing that just because it is the smallest of letters, that does not mean that it is less significant. In response, Hashem upgraded the position of the letter YOD by prepending that letter to the name of Moses' protégé Hosea, who name was changed to Joshua (Num. 13:16). In doing so, the letter HEY went from being the last letter in the name

of a righteous woman to being the first letter in the name of a righteous man (see Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 2:6, Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 107a, and Bereishit Rabbah §47:1).

The Talmud (Brachot 13a, see also Tosefta Brachot 1:14 and Bereishit Rabbah §47:1) explains the significance of Sarai/Sarah's name change by noting that the name Sarai implies that she was a princess only of her own nation, while the name Sarah means that she is a princess over the entire world. Rashi (to Brachot 13a and Gen. 17:15) further clarifies that this distinction is derived from the fact that the YOD at the end of Sarai is reminiscent of the first-person possessive, which limits Sarai's prominence. Similarly, Maharal (Tiferet Yisrael ch. 49) writes that the appearance of YOD as the final letter in Sarai implies diminution and limitation because YOD is orthographically the smallest letter in the Hebrew Alphabet, while the HEY of Sarah implies expansion and growth.

The Maharsha (to Brachot 13a) explains the shift slightly differently: Initially, Sarai's prominence and prestige was to be limited to her own lifetime, because as long as she lived, people would look up to her; but once she died, she would have had no progeny to continue her legacy. Afterwards, once she was renamed Sarah, this extended her princely role to beyond her lifetime, as Sarah (but not Sarai) was destined to bear a son, Isaac, whose descendants would continue on with her life mission.

**To read the full version of this essay and the second installment, please visit: <https://ohr.edu/this-week/whats-in-a-word/>*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Batra 130-136

The Joy of Torah Study

The Rabbis said about Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel: When he was involved in Torah study, every bird that flew above him burned up.

This statement concludes a *beraita* on our *daf*, one that is also taught in *Masechta Succah* 28a. The *beraita* teaches the lofty qualities and merits of the eighty closest students of the Sage Hillel the Elder. Thirty of them were exalted enough that the *Shechina* (Hashem's Divine Presence) should surround them, and thirty others were illustrious enough that the sun should stand still on their account, as it did for Yehoshua. The greatest of these disciples was Yonatan ben Uziel, about whom said, "When he was involved in Torah study, every bird that flew above him was burned."

Rashi, Tosefot and Rabbeinu Chananel, in *Masechet Succah*, explain the source of this "fire from him to Heaven." Rashi says that the *malachei hasharet* (Hashem's administering angels) gathered around this Sage to listen to the words of Torah that came directly from his mouth, and that they were the source of this effect. Rabbeinu Chananel writes that it was a result of the "Glory of the Divine Presence" being with him at his place of Torah study. Tosefot explains that when Yonatan ben Uziel was involved in Torah study, his words of Torah were as joyous as they were as when they were given at Mount Sinai. His Torah involvement was a re-creation of that seminal event of the giving of the Torah with fire, the fire that surrounded the mountain top at the time when the Torah was given by Gd to the Jewish People.

Nowadays, Yonatan ben Uziel may be best known for his translation of the *Nevi'im* (The Books of the Prophets, see *Masechet Megillah* 3a), which are read publicly in the Synagogue in our time in some communities together with the reading of the *haftara* on Shabbat.

▪ ***Bava Batra 134a***

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Ten generations have passed since Noach. Man has descended spiritually. In the year 1948 from Creation, Avram is born. By observing the world, Avram comes to recognize G-d's existence, and thus merits G-d appearing to him. At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, G-d tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where G-d will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants, and those whom they converted to faith in G-d. When they reach the land of Canaan G-d appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants.

A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife's beauty could cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram asks her to say that she is his sister. Sarai is taken to Pharaoh, but G-d afflicts Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to Eretz Yisrael (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. During a quarrel over grazing rights between their shepherds, Avram decides to part ways with his nephew Lot. Lot chooses to live in the rich but corrupt city of Sodom in the fertile plain of the Jordan. A war breaks out between the kings of the region and Sodom is defeated. Lot is taken captive. Together with a handful of his converts, Avram rescues Lot, miraculously overpowering vastly superior forces, but Avram demurs at accepting any of the spoils of the battle.

In a prophetic covenant, G-d reveals to Avram that his offspring will be exiled to a strange land where they will be oppressed for 400 years, after which they will emerge with great wealth and return to Eretz Yisrael, their irrevocable inheritance. Sarai is barren and gives Hagar, her Egyptian hand-maiden, to Avram in the hope that she will provide them with a child. Hagar becomes arrogant when she discovers that she is pregnant. Sarai deals harshly with her, and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel, Hagar returns to Avram and gives birth to Yishmael. The weekly portion concludes with G-d commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a Divine covenant. G-d changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and his entire household.

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

LOVING THE CONVERT

Mitzvos #63, #64, #431, and #590

The Torah commands us to love converts as ourselves, to treat them with compassion and to be careful not to cause them any injustice or suffering. Our Sages count no less than 36 commandments in the Torah that ensure the wellbeing of converts (e.g., Shemot 22:20, 23:9, Vayikra 19:33-34, and Devarim 10:19). These Mitzvos apply in addition to those which apply to every Jew. Therefore, one who shows love to a convert fulfills both the mitzvah of loving a fellow Jew and the mitzvah of loving a convert. Why does Hashem repeat this precept so many times?

The Midrash explains (Bamidbar Rabbah 8:2) that Hashem loves converts tremendously and cares greatly about their welfare. It is therefore stated in Tehillim 146:9: "Hashem protects converts." One of the ways He protects them is by commanding us repeatedly to treat them with love and compassion. The Midrash cites Hashem as saying to the Jewish People: "A convert has left behind his family, his nation and all that the world has to offer to come and join us. It is only fitting that we appreciate this and treat him accordingly!"

A second opinion among our Sages (Bava Metzia 59b) maintains that Hashem's primary concern in commanding us so many times to be so careful with converts is that if they are not treated well, they are liable to return to their previous religion. Indeed, the Egyptian converts who joined the Jewish nation at the time of the Exodus sought to return to Egypt when they encountered hardship (Piskei Rabbeinu Avigdor HaTzarfati, Mishpatim, citing Bamidbar 14:4).

When the Torah commands us to not cause any suffering to converts (Shemot 22:20), it adds, "because you were sojourners (geirim) in the land of Egypt." The Gemara (Bava Metzia ibid.) explains this to mean that it is inappropriate for us to treat converts unlovingly because we ourselves share their "fault," since we began as a family of seventy foreigners sojourning in Egypt. At that humble beginning of our history as a nation, we were unfamiliar with the land and vulnerable to the native Egyptians, who took advantage of our inherent weakness and enslaved us. Having experienced this, we must be especially careful not to treat converts in the same way (see Bechor Shor to Shemos 22:20).

On a deeper level of understanding, we are all sojourners in this temporary world. Even David, a well-established monarch and world power, said about himself, "I am a sojourner before You" (Tehillim 39:13). Radak explains: Just like a sojourner has no set place in a foreign land and is ready to relocate at any time, so too a person in this world has no steady standing and permanence. Every day, his standing is liable to change, and he does not know when the day

will come when he will have to leave this world entirely. David continues, “a temporary resident like all my ancestors.” Alshich explains that David was referring to the Patriarchs, who were sojourners in the land of Canaan and had to move around constantly. Avraham, the ultimate sojourner, left behind his family, people, and idolatrous theology to begin entirely anew in a foreign land. It is apt that he was famous for drawing in converts and would be known as the “father of all converts.” He could intimately relate to converts, not only because he himself was a convert and a foreigner but also because his lack of any sense of permanence in the physical helped him to focus on the truly permanent spiritual world and on his relationship with the Eternal. From the perspective of eternity, we are no more than foreigners in this world, eternal souls residing in temporal bodies.

Accordingly, we may thus suggest that by commanding us to relate to converts as ourselves, Hashem means to remind us that we, too, are not truly natives in this world. We remain “sojourners in a foreign land,” as we were in Egypt, to this very day. We are only passing through, as fast as time flies. Like a renter who would rather save money until he can afford to purchase his own house, and thinks twice and three times before investing anything in his landlord’s house that he will soon leave behind, we ought to invest the bulk of our resources and energy in our everlasting home in the World to Come. This way of life is the path that has been trodden upon firmly and successfully by the Patriarchs, King David and all the great people in Jewish history.

SPECIAL ARTICLE

THE DUALITY OF LOT

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

The character of Lot is a subject of much discussion among the commentators. As Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler in *Michtav M'Eliyahu* explains in his essay on *Lech Lecha*, there are *Midrashim* which are glaringly contradictory in their description of him. He is portrayed in some as *tzadik gamor* and in others as a *rasha*. This dichotomy emerges from the *Chumash* and *Meforshim*.

Parshas Lech Lecha introduces Lot as a loyal and devoted nephew of Avram (later Avraham). Although it was Avram who received the commandment from Hashem of “*lech lecha*,” Lot chooses to follow his uncle to an uncertain destination. While Avram had received promises from Hashem to counteract the impoverishing and debilitating effects of travel into an unknown land, and to him the command of “*lech lecha*” was a *nisayon*, to Lot, who received no such reassurances from Hashem, his decision to follow his uncle must be seen as an act of *miseras nefesh*. In fact, the *HaEmek Davar* states that Lot’s decision entitled him to receive a share of Avraham’s portion in *Eretz Canaan*.

Soon after their arrival in Canaan, the land is stricken with famine. As a result, Avram decides to dwell in Egypt, where there is an abundance of food. Lot now has an additional reason to return to his homeland in *Ur Chasdim*. Egypt is a dangerous place for Avram. If the Egyptians discover that the beautiful Sarai is Avram's wife they will kill him so she could marry the Pharaoh. As a male member of Avram's party, and a possible defender or avenger of Avram, Lot's life is also in danger. Yet, Lot chooses to follow Avram there.

It is in Egypt that Lot earns his merit to be saved from the destruction of Sodom by demonstrating his great loyalty to Avram and his pity on him by not revealing to the Egyptians that Sarai was really Avram's wife and not his sister, a lie that Avram had urged her to maintain. One may ask: "What great loyalty or expression or pity was it for Lot not to reveal this secret? It doesn't appear to have cost Lot anything to have kept quiet?" But upon reflection one can see that this is not the case.

With his childless uncle dead, Lot, as his closest male relative would inherit not only Avram's substantial material wealth, but also his right to ownership of *Eretz Yisroel*. As someone drawn to materialism, this realization assuredly did not escape Lot. Despite the strong pull that instant wealth must have had on Lot, he resisted it. Furthermore, with his uncle dead, Lot would then inherit the mantle of leadership of the Monotheistic movement started by Avram. *HaEmek Davar* says that in Egypt Lot became Avram's main disciple and acted as his go-between for the masses of people who came to Avram to seek his advice and wisdom. As a result of his *shimush*, he too grew in wisdom and was asked by many people for his guidance. In fact, according to one source, Lot, in Egypt, became even more successful than Avram in winning converts to the idea of Monotheism. As a person who greatly desired *k'vod*, as we shall see later, it must have taken a good deal of self-restraint on the part of Lot not to reveal this information. We see from here an indication of Lot's struggles with his *yetzer hora* and his mastery over it earning him the title of *tzadik gamor*.

Upon Lot's leaving Egypt with Avram and journeying with him to Canaan, we see other positive aspects of his personality and good reason to think him a *tzadik gamor* - an objective *tzadik*, as opposed to a *tzadik* relative to the people around him. Lot's *yetzer hora* for illicit relations was a major factor in his decision to move to Sodom. It would be logical to assume then that Lot also must have been attracted to *Mitzraim*, which was a land steeped in immorality. Yet the Torah relates that when Lot left Egypt with Avram he went *imo* (with him), signifying that he went wholeheartedly.

This same event, Lot's leaving *Mitzraim* with Avram, is used by one commentator to illustrate Lot's lofty spiritual *madrega*. Even though *Eretz Caanan* was still in the midst of a famine and Egypt was a very rich and lush country, Lot chose to leave with Avram rather than stay. This is especially significant when seen in light of his decision to separate from Avram and to settle in Sodom because of its material richness and immorality. We clearly see that from the moment he is introduced until his departure from Egypt with Avram, Lot is shown as a *tzadik gamor* and worthy successor to Avram in all aspects.

After Lot settles in Sodom, one sees in the Torah's description of the events following the arrival of the *malochim* (angels) to that city, other positive aspects of Lot's character. The Torah relates that Lot had just been appointed a judge in that most wicked city in the world.

From the derision with which the men of Sodom treat Lot in his later attempt to protect his guests, one could conclude that Lot was a serious judge who intended to pervert justice as little as possible under the circumstances. Despite his own wife's inhospitality to guests, Lot persisted in echoing the praiseworthy *mitzvah* of *hachnosas orchim* as he had seen practiced in Avram's house. As *Michtav M'Eliyahu* points out, by the Torah's describing his importuning of the *malochim* to come to his house for food and shelter as *m' od* (great), it must mean that Lot insisted to a degree approaching force. Under the laws of Sodom, which meted out the death penalty for the "crime" of giving food to a stranger, the behavior of this newly appointed judge was certainly praiseworthy.

Indeed, we soon see that Lot risked his life for his guests. When the wild and perverted mob of Sodomites practically broke down his door in their attempt to do violence to them, Lot went outside to confront the mob and attempted to dissuade them from their evil purpose. Although they threatened Lot with a fate worse than that which they proposed for his guests, he still refused to hand them over.

We also see that Lot had apparently imparted to his children the importance of the *mitzvah* of *tzedaka*. *Rashi* quotes a *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (109b) about a certain girl who had given food to a poor man and as a punishment had been tortured by the Sodomites by being smeared with honey, tied to a rooftop and stung to death by bees. According to a number of sources, this was Lot's daughter.

As positive as those aspects of his personality were, the Torah shows us many negative aspects as well. *Michtav M'Eliyahu* quotes a *Medrash* which states that the famine which befell Canaan was a direct result of Avram's decision to bring Lot with him to that land. An indication of this is seen in Lot's name. Lot in *at-bash* (a reverse alphabetical method of finding hidden meaning in the written Torah) is *cafan*, which means famine. Likewise, as *Rashi* says on the *posuk* "And Hashem spoke to Avram after Lot separated from him ... " - that as long as that *rasha* (Lot) was with him, the *Shechinah* failed to appear to Avram.

Indeed, Lot's decision to agree to separate from Avram and his subsequent continued residence in Sodom shows his baser motivations very clearly. The *posuk* describing his decision: "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that all of it was well-watered ... like the garden of Hashem, like the land of Egypt," indicates that Lot was motivated by materialism. After residing in Sodom for a period of time, Lot is captured in war and is only saved by the efforts of his uncle Avram. Instead of reflecting on the reason for his capture (his living in Sodom), and drawing the rather obvious conclusion that not only was living in Sodom bad for one's spirit but was also physically dangerous, he nevertheless elects to return to that capital of iniquity. He did not leave after his daughter was killed by the Sodomites because of her righteous behavior. And when he narrowly escaped death at the hand of the mob and was warned that the city and all its inhabitants are going to be destroyed, he still had to be dragged away by the *malochim*. Even at the very end of the episode describing the destruction of Sodom, while fleeing the burning cities of the plain, he yet begs that a remnant of his worthless lifestyle be preserved by asking that *Tzoar*, the last surviving city of the Sodom Metropolitan Area, not be destroyed. He failed to do *teshuvah* even then. And in Lot's last appearance in the Torah, we see the level to which he has fallen. He lets himself get involved in *arayos*,

forbidden sexual relations, with his daughters. The fault was entirely his. His daughters acted out of praiseworthy motives - preservation of the human race. They thought that the whole earth was being destroyed, as it was in Noah's time, and that their father was the last man on earth. Lot knew the truth. The *malochim* had told him that only the cities comprising the Sodom Metropolitan Area were being destroyed for their wickedness, but he did not relate this fact to his daughters.

What underlies this dichotomy in Lot's character? What led to his decision to separate from Avram? Why does the *Torah* bother to tell us his story at all? What lessons are we to learn from Lot?

To begin, it is instructive to look at the *posukim* describing the actual separation. The *Torah* relates that because both Avram and Lot were so rich, the land could not support them both. As a result, disputes arose between their respective shepherds. But, it was not competition for pastureland that was their only point of contention. *Rashi*, on the *posuk* describing their separation (*Bereshis* 13-11), cites a *Medrash* which states that Lot wanted neither Avram nor his G-d. There is no reason to believe that Lot ever consciously thought such a thought. On the contrary, there is much evidence that Lot never consciously abandoned the belief that Avram had taught him. The *Torah* itself illustrates many examples of Lot's continuing in the traditions of Avram. But, as *Michtav M'Eliyahu* says in many places, when one has a *negiyus*, a personal interest in the outcome of a certain event, *emes* (truth) is obscured. *Negiyus* triggers justification, rationalization and other psychological mechanisms, which hide from a person his real motives for acting as he does. As it is a barrier to *emes*, it is a major obstacle to a person's advancing to a higher spiritual plane, and as such, a formidable tool in the hands of the *yetzer hora*. The *Medrash*, therefore, could be telling us what went on subconsciously in Lot's mind. Yet these subconscious thoughts represent his truest feelings.

Lot was now in a situation in which psychologically he was forced to justify these innermost thoughts with his conscious self-image, as a follower of the belief that Avram taught. Otherwise, how could he abandon his Rebbe, Avram, and go off to live in an environment so obviously materialistic and immoral? In a brilliant psychological insight, *Michtav M'Eliyahu* maintains that Lot went to Sodom thinking of himself as a *kiruv* worker, trying to reform a wayward population. Given such an image of himself, Lot could now vicariously indulge in the immorality of Sodom while at the same time scolding its depraved behavior. Since he himself didn't realize his true motivations, he could rise to seemingly great levels of *mesirus nefesh* as he did in his importuning and then protecting the *melochim* or educating his daughter to be charitable to the poor. Yet the true measure of these acts is noted by the *Torah*'s failure to mention any reward received for them. This behavior, it seems, is motivated rather by Lot's *yetzer hora* eager to pull the wool further down over his eyes. The falsity of Lot's surface level motivation is apparent from the fact that the only one who appears to have changed in Sodom is Lot himself, who has sunk so low that he ends up having relations with his daughters. The Sodomites remained unchanged.

Therefore, according to this analysis, one reason for Lot's separation from his uncle was his inability to reconcile his desire to live in Sodom with the teachings of Avram. By leaving Avram he removed himself from both his teacher and his teacher's conception of the Divine.

Thus, he no longer was constantly reminded of his inconsistencies and shortcomings. He is the very prototype of the man "that does right in his own eyes." When we see this phrase in the Prophets, as we do many times to describe people who make up their own rules and disregard Hashem's commandments, the Torah is not just euphemizing, but, is actually describing the state of mind of man's attempt to justify his behavior to himself. Man can easily live a lie, but he has great difficulty living with discordancy. If he removes himself from the source of his discomfort he can easily forget about the niggling questions that bother him and pursue a life style driven by his baser desires and justify them to himself as part of his "philosophy". This is what Lot sought.

As the Torah continues its narrative, we can now see clearly how dwelling in Sodom has affected Lot. While protecting his guests even at the cost of his own life, he was willing to give his two remaining daughters - his only remaining children - to a rampaging mob "to do with them as they pleased." The *Medrash Tanchuma (Vayera 12)* states that a normal man would risk his life to save the chastity of his daughters and wife, yet Lot volunteered them to a sadistic mob. We also see from the incident with his daughters in the cave, this major character defect. As previously mentioned, the fact that upon leaving Sodom, Lot did not reveal to his daughters that those cities had been destroyed for their wickedness and that the rest of the world was not affected, was the cause of his daughters' error and resulted in them believing that they were performing a *mitzvah* by perpetuating their father's seed.

As stated earlier, Rav Dessler indicates that his reason for staying in Sodom was one that he himself couldn't see. As the Sages tell us in *Pirkei Avos*, three things remove a person from the world. *kinah, taivah and kavod*. These same factors blinded Lot to the truth.

His jealousy of Avram's wealth and his love of immorality and materialism caused him to dwell in Sodom and not leave even when it was objectively clear that it was causing his own downfall. Because of his desire for *kavod*, he wanted his daughters to think that he was the only human in the world worthy of being saved, making him comparable to Noah, on one level, and, by surviving even Avram, raising his status to that of the greatest *tzadik* the world had ever seen. The desire for *kavod* would also explain his securing a position as a judge in a city where justice was totally perverted. Any truly righteous person, had he been asked to enforce their uniformly unjust laws, would have declined the position and its accompanying honor. Lot accepted.

A question that arises from all this is - What was there in Lot that Hashem saw fit to have *Moshiach* descended from him? Although we see that Lot himself brought about his own embarrassment by concealing from his daughters the knowledge that he was not the last man on earth, the Medrash says that wine had been prepared in the cave for the purpose of getting Lot drunk so that his daughters could cohabit with him and beget *Moshiach*. The daughters must also have taken the presence of the 'wine in the cave as a miraculous occurrence placed there Providentially to aid in the propagation of humanity. Rav Zev Leff sees in Lot the epitome of the Two Thousand years of *Tohu v'Vohu*, which ended with Avraham Avinu, who ushers in the Two Thousand years of Torah. Lot in many ways is the embodiment of *Tohu v'Vohu*. He's a mixture of good and evil, undirected mitzvahs, kindness without propriety. That is why Avraham had to part from him. As Avram tells him, they must separate "because

we are brothers.” We look the same on the outside, but on the inside we are different. Because of that, Avram sees in Lot a danger that no one else in the world presents. Lot is by his very being a misrepresentation of Avram. He is, in a sense, a prototype Avraham from a different generation. For this reason, neither Avraham nor the *Shneinah* cannot abide his presence. Lot represents what Avraham had as his mission to correct. The mixing of good and evil in man. That which had as its starting point the eating of the *Etz Hadas* needs to be corrected so that the world can return to its ideal state. It took someone of Avraham's stature to begin the breakout from the state of *Tohu v'Vohu* and to create the Jewish People through which the world will eventually have its *Tikun*. But, inherent in the mission of the *Moshiach* is the message that everything that happens in the world is good. Therefore, there is good in *Tohu v'Vohu*. To illustrate Hashem's presence even in that cloudy and murky area, Hashem saw fit to bring *Moshiach* - the embodiment of the ultimate of human good from the epitome of that confused epoch - Lot.

subscribe @ ohr.edu

to receive Ohrnet directly to your email each week