



PARSHAS VAYEIRA 5778

These parshiyos describe the birth of the Jewish people together with other personalities which the Torah discusses. Among these personalities is Lot. Logically, Lot is a mystery. But practically, there are thousands of Orthodox Jews who fit the exact profile of Lot.

Avrohom Ovinu was one of three brothers. One of them was Horon, who had three children – Lot, Sorai and Milkoh. So Avrohom's nephew and niece become his wife and brother-in-law.

The incident of the Kivshon Ho'aish took place in a dramatic way and Terach had to leave Ur Kasdim with his family. He could have moved anywhere, but he chose to travel to Eretz Yisroel. Why there? Because that is where the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver was located. This meant that Terach must have experienced a tremendous hisorerus. He saw an open miracle – a nes nigleh – his son was thrown into a fire and was saved. Avrohom was now able to explain to people the truth of Hashem's existence in a more tangible way, and Terach was obviously profoundly affected. He wanted to go to Yeshivas Shem Vo'eiver to learn more about Hashem.

But every hisorerus needs to be concretized into action immediately to make sure that feelings don't fade away. Unfortunately, Terach had to travel a long distance to reach Eretz Yisroel. He couldn't walk straight across the desert. He had to go through Turkey and pass Choron before going south into Eretz Yisroel. Along the way, Terach lost his hisorerus and decided to stop in Choron for good. He traveled most of the way, but in the end he fizzled out.

His son Horon had died in the Kivshon Ho'aish back in Ur Kasdim. How? Horon wasn't sure with whom he would align himself. He decided to wait and see what would happen to Avrohom and Nimrod first and then join the side of the winner of the contest. But Hashem only saves people who sincerely follow Him come-what-may. He didn't save Horon and Horon got consumed by the fire after Avrohom was saved. Nochor, the third brother, stayed back in Ur Kasdim and moved to Choron later on.

So Terach's family moved to Choron. But Hashem told Avrohom to continue going. Lot is still living with this hisorerus and goes along with Avrohom into the unknown.

When they arrived in Eretz Yisroel, they were immediately faced with another nisayon – famine. Hashem promised to make Avrohom very wealthy, and although Avrohom isn't aware of this, forcing them down to Egypt was Hashem's way of arranging this. Because Lot stayed with Avrohom, he became wealthy as well. But this is where Lot's hisorerus suddenly fades. He kept it going for a very long time through many difficult events, but the nisayon of wealth overwhelmed him. It is a harder than all the other nisyonos.

Lot is intoxicated with his newly found wealth and his appetite

is whetted for even more. He has his sights on being Avrohom's only heir and is now anticipating inheriting the Land of Cana'an all for himself. So he is sloppy in curbing his flock from grazing in other people's fields. The money went to his head and now he begins cutting corners. This is standard human behavior, and Lot's hisorerus is taken over by his pursuit of money.

Avrohom and Lot have to part ways and Lot chooses Kikar HaYarden and the Sedom region. The posuk testifies that Lot was fully aware of the corrupt and evil nature of Sedom's residents at the time. But he didn't care. His ruchniyus concerns are now secondary to his financial concerns. He still held on to many important middos and values from Avrohom's house which he displayed to his own guests. But his inspiration to strive for higher levels of ruchniyus is gone.

In truth, Avrohom should have thrown Lot out of his household earlier, but Avrohom's chessed didn't let him. The result is that Hashem stopped communicating with Avrohom while Lot is in his presence. After Lot leaves, Hashem showers Avrohom with all kinds of brochos.

In the end, Avrohom saved Lot from capture. But he refuses to take any riches from the King of Sedom. He understood that his wealth came from Hashem alone and to take money from the King of Sedom would corrupt that awareness just as it had corrupted Lot.

In this week's parsha, Hashem informs Avrohom that he is destroying Sedom and Avrohom pleads for all the city's inhabitants. He knows Lot will be saved anyway. The Malochim come to Sedom to save Lot and Rashi explains that they find him sitting at the gate of judgment. He became the judge of Sedom on that very day of its destruction. This is striking. We know that Lot did not personally descend into the morally depraved culture of Sedom. He went out of his way to invite guests at great personal risk! Lot is very righteous and he is finally installed as a judge in Sedom, seemingly a positive replacement to all the corruption that has been going on until then. And this is the day Hashem decides to destroy Sedom?! Why?

I discussed this with my Rebbe Zatza"l and he shared with me that he too was perplexed about this Rashi until he experienced rule under the Communists. He explained that during the reign of the Czar, the government officials and judges, although deeply Anti-Semitic, were also deeply corrupt and could be bribed with money to look the other way. This was how Jews managed to get by all those years. They played the corrupt system to their advantage and survived. But all the Jewish intellectuals couldn't tolerate the injustice and corruption of the Czarist government and abandoned Yiddishkeit to join the Communist revolution. They thought this was the way to right all the wrongs and finally bring about total equality. It turns out that the Communists became just as cruel and corrupt as the old system of the Czar. But now the Jewish intellectuals were

enforcing that system. When honest people are duped into enforcing a corrupt system, there is no way anyone can survive. So too, when Lot was chosen to enforce the corrupt system of Sedom, then all hope was lost and Hashem decided Sedom must be destroyed.

Lot treats his guests with the chessed he absorbed from Avrohom with mesirus nefesh. They revealed themselves as malochim and performed nissim to blind the mob that surrounded his house. Having spent time in Avrohom's house, Lot recognized their true identity and agreed to go along with them. But his sons-in-law are not convinced. They are too integrated into the society of Sedom to realize what's coming. Only his wife and two unmarried daughters are leaving with him. They are given explicit instructions by the malochim: Don't Look Back.

Lot forgot that his wealth was really due to his association with Avrohom Ovinu. He fantasized that he could gain unlimited wealth on his own when he parted from Avrohom and settled in Sedom. He tried to keep up his personal standard of righteousness while in Sedom and kept himself somewhat separate. But now he has to realize that his connection to Sedom has only brought him trouble and will become his complete undoing if he remains any longer. His pursuit of money has led him to complete failure. He has to leave everything behind and never look back. This is not easy – even when he sees the truth before his eyes. So he hesitates to try to save his money. The malochim forcibly grab him and whisk him away, warning him that if he looks back and retains even a mental connection to Sedom, he will share their fate. His wife turned back and she turned into a pillar of salt.

Lot is now given an option. He can return to Avrohom on the mountain or go somewhere else. Lot refuses to return to Avrohom. He doesn't feel worthy to be in his presence so he flees to a younger city which eventually gets destroyed as well.

People have bechiroh chofshis before they fall and after they fall. Just because someone fails doesn't mean he can't pick himself up and get back on track. But when you don't struggle to get back on track, the chances are that you will fall even further instead of remaining stationary. Lot refused to come back into Avrohom's orbit after leaving Sedom. The story of his two daughters was a result.

Lot is a tragic personality. He was a very inspired individual and held on to that hisroerus for a very long time through many trials. But when faced with a nisayon of money, his inspiration fizzled. The wealth – which came from Avrohom – went to his head and he fantasized that he can go on alone without Avrohom, become more wealthy, and still not be corrupted. When he realized the truth of the matter that his pursuit of wealth and leaving Avrohom was his undoing and leading him to destruction, he escaped destruction, but refused to return to his former level with Avrohom Ovinu. When you don't try to get back to where you were, then you fall even further.

In the end of the parsha we have the story of the Akeidoh. Avrohom Ovinu was both deeply inspired and exceedingly wealthy. The money didn't go to his head and he wasn't corrupted by it. He was the same Avrohom Ovinu before he became wealthy and after. The nisayon of the Akeidoh is complete and the posuk only mentions that Avrohom returns to the lads and goes to settle in Be'er Shevah. No mention of Yitzchok.

Where is Yitzchok? Where did he go after the Akeidoh?

Chazal tell us that he went to Yeshiva Shem and Ever to

learn. That means Yitzchok had a very different experience of the akeidoh than what Avrohom Ovinu had. It perhaps was greater. He was a 37 year old adult, yet was relying on his father's report that Hashem told him to sacrifice Yitzchok. Later on, when we are told Yitzchok is blind, Chazal explain that his blindness came from the tears of the malochim in Heaven which fell into his eyes while on the mizbe'ach about to be sacrificed. What message is being conveyed with this imagery?

Chazal are telling us that Yitzchok became so holy and removed from physical existence in that state on the mizbe'ach – which he concretized by immediately going to Yeshivas Shem Vo'eiver– that afterwards, he could no longer perceive any evil in this world. He rose beyond evil and couldn't conceive of its existence. He was blinded to the evil that his own son Eisov embodied. Yitzchok took his inspiration from the Akeidoh and solidified it through limud haTorah.

Torah can affect people in very different and profound ways. Before we are mekabel malchus shomayim in Shacharis, we say Ahavoh Rabboh. We first talk about how Hashem created and governs the world and everything that happens through the various forces He controls. We understand how that leads to kabbolas ol malchus shomayim. But why do we talk about limud HaTorah and ask for understanding? What does that have to do with the subject?

The answer is that there is no way to have a kabboloh without Torah and there is no way to hold onto your kabboloh without Torah. Why?

Kabbolas Ol Malchus Shomayim has two aspects to it. One is recognizing that Hashem is the only power that exists in the world. He causes everything to happen and there are no other causes. Everything is created, caused and run by Hashem alone. Achdus is a form of kabbolas ol malchus shomayim.

Secondly, people have a lot of ideas of how they want to live their lives and what values they want to subscribe to. But our job is to be submit our lives to halacha and our mind and logic to the mind and logic of the Torah. What I think is right and wrong is not important. I don't dictate to Hashem what I think the Torah should say. I break my head to try to understand what Hashem's ideas are and why they make sense. If you come to a conclusion different than the Torah's, then your mind is not in sync with the Torah's thinking and you have to adjust it. That is another form of kabbolas ol malchus shomayim.

After a person has thought through the reality of the world and realizes that it is Hashem who is running it, it's easy to get distracted and lose sight of that clarity over time. A Jew has to work hard to hold on and make Hashem a part of his daily life. That is what the ongoing commitment to limud Torah does for us. It keeps our awareness and our priorities in focus throughout our lives.

This is what Yitzchok Ovinu was able to do through limud HaTorah while Terach failed.

The Nefesh Hachayim explains that while our minds are thinking about various intricate sugyas in Shas, we are connecting our minds to Hashem in the most powerful and intense way. This is why Ahava Rabba comes before Kriyas Shema and ensures that we can be mekabbel malchus shomayim properly and permanently. Limud HaTorah is the key.

There are different groups of Jews. Some are fortunate enough to remain physically in the Beis Midrash and learn all day long to keep Hashem in focus. Others may be physically

outside the Beis Midrash, but they can still connect themselves to limud haTorah in various ways throughout the day as well. This happens before Shacharis, during your commute to work, during your lunch break, and at night after you come home. It all depends on how badly you want to retain that inspiration and that hisorerus.

Yitzchok knew the secret of retaining inspiration. Terach knew it as well, but he couldn't bring himself to pursue it till the end.

Then we have Lot. He also understood that the key to rising in spiritual levels and getting wealthy was staying with Avrohom Ovinu. But he got distracted by money and it was his undoing.

After he fell, he couldn't bring himself to come back to Avrohom Ovinu and regain his spiritual level.

People very quickly realize that their Yiddishkeit is flat and shallow without that ongoing connection to limud haTorah when they leave yeshivah. It may seem grueling and exhausting, but non-stop learning in yeshivah is a training-ground for setting the pattern of one's instinctive connection to limud haTorah throughout your life. What solidifies a person's yiddishkeit while in yeshivah and after, is that constant contact with limud haTorah.