

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: *Torah Vayera:* Genesis 19:30-38
Haftarah: II Kings 4:14-17
B'rit Chadasha: II Peter 2:9-11

He and his two daughters lived in a cave.

[Genesis 19:30b]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 140:6-11;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition No. 1, *Da'at*, and the Prayer for Knowledge

Vaya'al Lot miTzo'ar - And Lot went up from Tzoar ... *vayeshev bahar ushteiv v'notav imo* – and he dwelt on a mountain with his two daughters. Genesis 19:30a.

Lot's separation from Avraham had not worked out well. The son of Charan had chosen to live, and raise his family, in Sodom – and that just proven to be a tragic mistake. The section of the Jordan Rift Valley lying between Jericho and Arad – which happened to be the base of operations from which darkness-obsessed Kena'ani warlords had been spewing uncleanness and toxicity into, and wreaking havoc upon, Creation - is now unrecognizable. The entire area, it seemed, exploded in a great fireball. Showers of brimstone rained down - and as a result, where there was once a lush, tropical valley teeming with life, there is now just a big hole in the earth, surrounded by a barren, salt crystal wasteland. Where a network of large and populous cities once sat, there is now just a very, very quiet, very, very salty, eerily 'Dead' sea. No human, no animal, no tree, no shrub, and no grass – not even a sand flea – will be able to live here until ... well, let's just say until *He comes*. Ezekiel 47:6-12.

The fire and brimstone storm that laid waste to Sodom and Gomorrah was like any other cataclysmic event affecting our world in at least one particular: it was up to the survivors how they would respond to what had transpired. Who were the survivors? The only survivors who actually hailed from the cities of the plain were Lot and his two unmarried daughters. These three had weathered catastrophic events before (in particular, the world war and related season of captivity described in Genesis 14); but this time was different. This time Lot lost his wife – and the girls lost their mother. How would they respond to personal grief on top of regional trauma? They had always focused more on societal ideas of 'family' and 'morality' than on any real relationship with the Holy One Himself. Would that change now? Would what happened around them – but was prevented by angelic intervention

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from happening to them – awaken them to a greater reality? Unfortunately, the answer will be ‘no’. They will cave-in to the onslaught of negative emotions. They will put their fingers in their ears and refuse to even consider that anything ‘good’ could emerge from Sodom and Gomorrah’s ashes. They will choose to consider it a small thing that the demonically controlled Kena’ani ‘cities of the plain’ can no longer either seduce or oppress the people of the world.

Out of all those who had called Sodom home, there were but three survivors. Lot and his daughters. The city where they had lived, traded, and socialized – and which they called ‘home’ - had been reduced to ashes. Its marketplaces, its amphitheatres, its sports complexes, and its pagan temples, as well as all its institutions of government, education, philosophy, and religion were nothing but smoking ruins. Thousands of decomposing bodies – human and animal - littered the landscape.

The survivors initially took shelter from the storm at the smallest and most remote of the Cities of the Plain – Tzoar. Soon, however, the ashes, the fumes, and the stench of death that sat over the Valley rendered that city uninhabitable as well. What were Lot and his daughters to do? Sodom, and the people, places, and things that had been their whole life were now all gone. They had no house. They had no food. They had no friends. There was no law, no order, no social structure, no civilization. The only possessions they had left in the world are the clothes on their backs and whatever items they managed to cram in their pockets as the angels hustled them out of the city. There was nothing left in the plain. It was time to move on. By the grace of the Holy One, and the intervention of angels, they had survived. But survival is one thing – picking oneself up, digging deep into one’s faith in the Holy One, and starting over is something else entirely.

***When Trauma Occurs or Disaster Strikes – How Will You Handle it?
What Will Be Your Legacy? What Will it Say About Your Faith?***

Because of the prevalence of *ra*, *shachat*, and *chamas* among human beings, crimes, wars, and human-engineered weather cataclysms happen in our world with stunning regularity. We don’t have to like it, but we may as well get used to it. Some of the life-threatening, culture-endangering hazards we face in this age are the result of hate-filled terrorists and ethno-crusaders doing what hate-filled terrorists and ethno-crusaders do; others feature power-corrupted elites, educators, and ideologues – and the brainwashed and/or drug-compromised minions that serve them - wreaking mayhem. Some cataclysms result from emotionally disturbed and/or over-medicated victims of media hype and hyperbole playing monster with bombs, knives, guns, machinery, malware, vehicles, malware/ransomware, artificial intelligence or words of incitement; others can be traced back to scientists

in lab coats playing population-control games with toxins and/or pathogens. Still other horrors result from medical personnel brainwashed by Big-Pharma pushing toxic substances through hypodermic needles. Sometimes disaster-scenarios flow from the uncontrolled envy, greed, and/or lust for power of tyrants pretending to be statesmen; other times at the root of it all is some fanatic group's obsession with and/or outrage over perceived injustice or inequity – past or present. Sometimes cyclones devastate entire coastlines; sometimes tornados cut mile-wide swaths of destruction. Sometimes earthquakes wreak havoc; sometimes roaring tsunamis wipe out population-centers. Sometimes volcanos spew lava and ash; sometimes famine, drought, flooding, blizzards, and heat waves lay waste to our world. Sometimes it is drinking and driving; other times it is family violence. Each time something unthinkable happens, however, it is up to *us* to choose how we will respond. Some people, of course, get tragically struck down in the destructive event itself; many more, however, just lay down and wallow in the aftermath. Aided and abetted by the frenzy-fueling ideologues of the media, some people short-circuit. They lose faith in the Creator and His Plan of Redemption and Restoration. They forsake Torah's ways of *wisdom, love, and shalom*. They let the quickening whisper of His Calling get drowned out by the dark din of the latest politician-spun, media-regurgitated '*sky-is-falling*' narrative. They look around for someone to blame and to hate. They actually listen when the media and politicians frame the narrative in such a way as to spotlight one of their political/ideological enemies - or some disfavored subgroup of the population - as the dastardly villain responsible for it all. They drink the focus-group approved formula of Kool-Aid to the dregs. They take the hate-bait. They hyperventilate. They over-emote. They choose to obsess over the 'injustice' of it all. They fume. They rant. They rage. They cry 'victim'. They take up offense. They nurse wounds. They regale in bitterness. They embrace outrage. They take to the street, chanting slogans. They shove their anger and their profanity-laced signs in people's faces. They block traffic. They set fires. They loot big-screen televisions and designer-label athletic shoes. They tear down statues. They remove boundary stones. They dissociate from the Creator. They lose sight of His Grand Plan. They forget who they are and why they have been given the breath of life at such a time as this. They soil their own salt, and they blow out their own lamplight. They adopt *the mocking tone and the perverse way of Cham* – in contrast to the gentle tone and respectful way of *Shem and Yafet*.

***It is For Us, The Living ...
But Where Do We Go From Here?***

Why Lot and his daughters did not go west, and try to reconnect with the two people who had always been there for them – *i.e.* Avraham and Sarah - we will never know. But they didn't. They ran as fast as they could in the opposite

direction. Perhaps they just weren't thinking clearly. Perhaps they were disoriented. Perhaps they felt too ashamed, or unworthy, or angry, or afraid, to face anyone – even kindly, gentle, caring Covenant Partners of the One Who rescued them. Perhaps they didn't think they could make it that far. Perhaps they were foolish enough to imagine that the Holy One had allowed His cherished prototypical Covenant family to perish in the great cataclysm as well. Perhaps they had had all they could stomach of what Avraham had always called the 'Promised Land'. But for whatever reason, Lot and his daughters didn't head west. Nor did they head north toward the city of Jericho. Nor did they head southward toward the Gulf of Aqaba, or to Egypt. They instead chose to head east, in the opposite direction from Avraham's encampment - into the hills of the land that would one day be called 'Moab'.

Eventually, across what was now the 'Dead Sea' from the once-bustling city they had once called home, the little trio of survivors found an uninhabited cave. They crawled inside, sat down ... and never really got up. They took inventory: a few lizards; a lot of spiders; a family of bats; a couple of nests of mice; probably a snake or two. All of these were 'unclean' creatures, of course - but the distinction between the 'clean' and the 'unclean' had always been Avraham's concern, not theirs. This cave would just have to do. It would provide them a warm place to hide, a dry place to sleep, and a convenient lair from which they could scavenge for food. There was water nearby. And if they had thought about it, they would have realized that as modest a new home as this might be, this cavern was far safer for and conducive to human habitation than Sodom ever had been. But they did not think about things like that. They could not think about what they had been given - only about what they had lost. All they could think about was the fact that the conveniences and active social calendars that they had known all their lives were gone forever. As weird and perverse as Sodom had been, they had learned to love it. They had learned to navigate its dangers. They had learned its no-fly zones. They had embraced its booming economy. They had delighted in its 'do what you want to do', 'don't ask, don't tell' culture, its party-til-you-drop atmosphere, its rowdy social scene, its exotic cuisine, and its never-a-dull-moment entertainment offerings, and its blatant indulgence of hyper-sensitivity, hyper-sensuality, hyper-sentimentality, and hyper-sexuality. The Mighty Babylon of the Jordan Valley had been their home; now it was fallen, and for this family the resulting loss was almost too much to bear. Those who surround themselves with uncleanness always eventually start to think, speak, and do uncleanness. We will see, to our dismay, how this plays itself out for this particular family later in this study. But first, let's consider how we got here in the first place.

The Last and Determinative Witness – The Way the Sanctified Ones of the Most High Are Viewed and Treated

The Holy One, we now know, had heard a loud and bitter *outcry* against the decadent cities of the lush, tropical, oil-rich Jordan River Valley. In response to this outcry, we learned, the Holy One sent *a delegation of angels* to Sodom to test the true character of the people there. The test revealed the utter and irreversible depravity of Sodom's residents. The presence of angels in the city clearly revealed that there was not even a trace of the fear of the Holy One, not a smidgeon of a cubit of love of His ways – and indeed, nothing whatever but perversion and the pursuit of pleasure - in the hearts of the residents of the Plain. Alas, there was *no faithful remnant*. There were no faithful witnesses. There was no spark of holiness. There was not an ounce of love of the Creator – much less His Ways – anywhere in the Plain. As a result, now the entire Jordan Rift Valley has been shaken, and the vast petroleum deposits the Holy One had placed in that valley first exploded, then were sealed off and hidden for the latter days by a heavy covering of brimstone and salt.

Today's aliyah is about the traumatic aftermath of that traumatic event – i.e. what happened after the smoke cleared and the molten salt cooled and crystallized. Are you ready for another shocker?

The Mist of Spiritual Darkness Surrounds and Suffocates

Today's aliyah is remarkable largely for what we do not see. Nowhere in today's aliyah is the Holy One mentioned. Nor, in fact, is any reference made to Him whatsoever. Indeed, today's events take place seemingly without any thought of, and totally isolated from (if that were possible) the Holy One. Even Avraham, though he is alive and well, and thriving, is apparently forgotten by Lot and his daughters. This aliyah is therefore about the dark, depressing things that come to be thought, said, and done when self-obsessed human beings cave-in to their own emotions, when they get caught up in their own priorities, when they allow themselves to be deceived by their own false perceptions of reality, and when they are driven to folly by their unspiritual concepts of what is good, evil, moral, immoral, right, wrong, fair, unfair, just, and unjust.

Each person we read about in today's aliyah is going to do what seems right in his or her own eyes – without ever giving thought to, much less consulting with, the Holy One. And that cannot ever – and certainly does not in this case - turn out well for anyone concerned. Thank Heaven the Holy One can redeem and make something good come from even our deepest, darkest days of folly.

Is This A City of Refuge ... Or Should We Look For Another?

It is customarily believed and oft-times confirmed that in times of danger and devastation people will focus upon the Holy One, turning to Him out of desperation. But Torah records that such is *not always the case*. In Lot's case the "post-traumatic stress disorder" or "shellshock", and perhaps the grief and guilt, became the focus of his life. The result was that he allowed himself to be separated from whatever relationship he had with the Holy One. No prayer. No blessing. No thanksgiving for deliverance. No praise. No lament. No meditation on the things Avraham had once taught him or inspired in him. No asking *why* – or *what now*. Nothing.

Ouch! One would hope, if not expect, that in the face of such trials someone later described by one Scriptural writer as a "righteous man" would be quick to *turn to and lean on the Holy One* in his time of crisis. One would hope that such a man would seek - and walk in – His faithful and caring Creator's wise counsel. One would hope that such a man and his offspring would willingly surrender at least a portion of their capacities of thought, speech, and action to the leading and redemptive vision of the Holy One - and that they would start life over with the hope that comes from communion with the Ultimate Creator, Redeemer, and 'Fixer'. Whatever the reason, this does not appear to be what happened with Lot – or with his daughters.

Lot's final spiral of destruction started in yesterday's aliyah, when his first response to being saved by an angel of the Holy One from the destruction of Sodom was to argue with that very angel. The angel had told him and his family: ***Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!*** Genesis 19:17. But Lot would not "***sh'ma***" [*i.e.* listen, hear, take to heart, obey, and incorporate into one's life as life-giving, life-redirecting truth]. Lot could not bear to leave the life he had chosen. He had chosen the wealth of the petroleum deposits of the Jordan valley - the place of tar pits. He wanted to stay "in the plain", apparently to rebuild his wealth, and start over, just a few kilometers down the Jordan Rift Valley from Sodom, in Tzoar. The Holy One – or was it the angel - *granted Lot's request*. But this, like many things, reminds us that we must be careful what we ask for. Tzoar was not at all what Lot expected. The vast petroleum deposits that had promised wealth untold were no longer accessible or usable. They were all buried beneath the salt and brimstone, sealed for a future day. No longer was the Plain of the Jordan a 'lush, tropical valley'.

Once Lot and his daughters arrived at Tzoar they immediately realized that starting over post-Sodom was not going to be anything like they had envisioned. There was for all practical purposes *no Tzoar left* - at least not as Lot had known it.

Reluctantly, Lot took his daughters and ran into the mountains - grudgingly doing at last what the angel had instructed him to do back before the destruction even began. Lot sought for himself and his family a cave - and he crawled in – and for all practical purposes, he never really left. And note what Torah does *not* say happened in that cave. Torah does not tell us that in those critical hours Lot or his daughters either sought the Holy One or so much as said ‘*Thank you*’ for the preserving of their lives. Torah does not indicate they tried to find either Avraham (Lot knew well the places Avraham ‘hung out’) or Melchizedek (who was only a few miles away, a little further up in the mountains). Torah does not indicate that they, as had Noach and his family, built an altar and/or worshipped the Holy One. Much less does Torah say they even called upon the Holy One’s Name. Apparently not one of them did any of these things.

Epic Failure To Pass on a Crisis-Worthy Faith To the Next Generation

Could it be that neither Lot nor his wife had ever taught their daughters anything *crisis-worthy* about the Creator and His ways? Could it be that Lot and his wife just never got around to discussing with their children the real issues of how to have a relationship with the Holy One that empowers a human being to overcome and transcend life’s crises and tragedies? Could it be that Lot and his wife left their children totally unprepared for – and uninspired by the prospect of - life outside the cultural norm?

Let that stunning prospect sink in on you for a few moments. Imagine a ‘faith walk’ and a worldview that neither prepares you for, much less assists you or anyone else through, a time of real crisis. Imagine passing on that kind of faith walk and worldview as a heritage to your children. That appears to be what Lot did.

We know Lot had a level of relationship with the Holy One. He had, indeed, seen the Holy One do miracles. He had enough of a sense of what healthy behavior is and is not that he bemoaned the spiking perversion in his city. But though he bemoaned the perversion in his city, he did nothing about it. When the flagrantly perverse city he loved - and from the economy of which he drew his livelihood - was judged and destroyed, he apparently could not imagine life without its tantalizing comforts. Lot’s relationship with the Holy One was apparently so shallow and fleshly and material in orientation that he had nothing of significant value to offer his children in the time of crisis. The sickening things we will read about in today’s aliyah of Torah are the natural result.

The picture we see in today’s aliyah of Torah is a picture of three people – Lot and

his daughters – who simply hunkered down in their chosen cave, surrendered to grief, self-pity, and fear, and never recovered. What is worse, it appears that they isolated themselves *not only* from their fellow men (who were alive and well and very nearby), but from the Holy One as well. They seem to have totally lost touch with their God-ordained purpose and destiny in life.

Please note, however that THE PROBLEM WAS NOT THE CAVE. If Lot had *sh'ma*-ed the angels' counsel, and run to the mountains, in the first place, he probably would have been in a cave even earlier. It was *not* separation from man that was Lot's main problem – it was separation from the Holy One. And it began a long, long time ago. Lot had allowed his immersion in Sodom – and that of his wife and daughters - to sever the drive for contact with God that they had learned from Avraham. They gave up – not on humanity, but on God. Sadly, *abuse of alcohol*, followed by *incest*, followed by *oblivion*, was the recorded result.

Lechah nash'keh et-avinu yayin v'nishkevah imo – *Come, let's play our father with wine, and lie with him Genesis 19:32*. Don't blame 'toxic masculinity' for this one! Sexual predators, it appears, come in female bodies as well as male ones! Like Cham did generations previously, these girls took advantage of the effects of too much wine to uncover their father's nakedness – and then to use him, without his effective consent, for their own purposes. They actually went a step further than Cham had – in that they conspired in advance to do their dark deed, and then actually took aggressive steps to *make sure their father was too inebriated to object* instead of just finding him in that state. Now we know what kind of approach to sexuality – and family – these girls learned in Sodom. Now we know how horribly dangerous Sodom was for human habitation.

In this unseemly manner Avraham's descendants – who later became Israel - obtained their closest neighbors, namely Moav [*i.e. 'of father'*], and Ammon [from 'Ben-Ami, *i.e.* son of my people]. Today we call the territory these people occupied the country of Jordan. But the people of modern-day Jordan are newcomers; the natural descendants the incestuous sons of Lot have been *scattered to the four winds*. The present occupants of Jordan are largely Arabs, who dispossessed the descendants of Moav and Ammon by force, or dismembered them at the edge of the sword, over a millennia ago.

Are the Cities In Which We Dwell Today In Danger of the Same Fate as Sodom?

Why were the cities of the Plain destroyed? The answer turns out not to be, as most theologians and religious leaders have propagandized, that those cities were inhabited by Godless evildoers who engaged in horrible forms of depravity, debauchery, and/or violence. Think about it - such is the case in every city, in every

nation, in every generation. It has always been so - and until Messiah returns it will always be so. But they are not destroyed. Indeed, no place where human beings that He lovingly Created live and raise families – however perverse the lifestyles they are living – has since been *destroyed by the Holy One merely on account of ‘sin’*. Cities are not destroyed by the Holy One simply because there is great ‘evil’ – no matter what the substance or the quantity of it - present in them. That would mean all cities, everywhere, would have to be destroyed. There is no city – indeed, no group of ten or more people, in which the unholy trinity of *ra*², *mish’chat*³, and *chamas*⁴ is not causing major mischief. But the Holy One is a God who always, as long as possible, chooses mercy over judgment and redemption over destruction. The worse a person – or a city is – the more glorious and impactful their redemption story becomes.

Why then – since not all sin-filled cities are destroyed - were Sodom and Amarah made an exception? The reason those cities are no longer in the world is much *more stunning and significantly more scandalous* than the presence in them, or even the predominance in them, of ‘evil’ - i.e. the unholy trinity of *ra*, *mish’chat*, and *chamas*. Those cities were singled out for destruction not because of the extent of rampant ‘evil’ that was in them, but *because they lacked any functioning or developing witness of Divine Love to offset - and redeem people from the horrible effects of - that ‘evil’*. The cities of the Plain had to be destroyed by a Wise and Caring Creator *because there were not in them even 10 people who loved the Holy One, who sh’ma-ed His Voice, who walked in and taught their children and their household His Ways, and who were willing to invest the time, the energy, the passion, the shalom, the mercy, and the kindness to build a counterculture founded in tzedek and mishpat*. Those cities had to be destroyed because there was not in them even a shadow of a faithful remnant who would stand in the gap, intercede, testify to and demonstrate the kindness of the Creator, who would offer an alternative to the rising tide of narcissism and its inevitable ripple-*tsunami* waves of perversion, and would call forth whatever few sparks of holiness remained in the

² What in the Hebrew text of Torah is called *ra* is not some nebulous form of ‘moral evil’ as men tend to think of it; it is, instead, merely the opposite of self-denial. It gives rise to every form of *narcissistic selfishness and egocentric self-promotion*.

³ What in the Hebrew text of Torah is called *mish’chat* is the kind of heart-hardening, mind-preoccupying, joy-stealing, *shalom*-killing corruption that comes from overexposure to and/or ingestion of creatures, things, thoughts, emotions, and attitudes that belong in the bio-degrading realms of the unclean [Hebrew *tamei*], and/or the common/profane [Hebrew *chol*].

⁴ What in the Hebrew text of Torah is called *chamas* includes every anti-social idea, ideology, indoctrination, and attitude that lead human beings to vain imaginations, to knee-jerk reactions, to the taking of offense, to the making of accusations and the insistence upon placing of blame, to hyper-emotionalism, to taking sides in other people’s drama, to the embracing of ‘moral’ outrage, to arrogant, divisive rhetoric, to manipulative behaviors, to alignment with mob mentality, to associations with vigilantism, to acts of vengeance, and to patterns of violent oppression.

city's residents and/or visitors.

For the entire region to have escaped this radical surgery it would not have been necessary for there to have been 10 people in the Plain that were as *tzedek* as Noach or Avraham. That would be hard in any city. All that would have been necessary for Sodom and the other cities of the Plain to be spared was for there to have been 10 people living there who were even as minimally *tzedek* as Lot. Had there been just 10 people who like Lot were just “tormented in their righteous souls from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds” the entire populace would have been spared. That is a very, very low bar. That is the mercy – and the wisdom – of the Holy One. But alas, there were not 10 such people in Sodom – or anywhere in the Plain. The eyes of the Holy One looked to and fro, and lo, there were nowhere close to that many. For that reason, the one man who possessed even a minimal level of *tzedek* – *i.e.* Lot – was spared by the Holy One with his household. But the cities themselves had to be destroyed, lest their unchecked perversion expand even further, and infect and pollute the whole earth.

The Frightening Legacy of Seared Consciences and Reprobate Minds

Remember that the Holy One had sent *Avraham* to save the peoples of Sodom from their enemies/captors from the East just a few years before this happened [Genesis 14]. That military invasion had been a dire prophetic warning, providing one last opportunity to turn to the God of Avraham, and walk in His ways. The warning so graciously given by the Holy One had, however, been *ignored* by the residents of Sodom and the other Cities of the Plain. The opportunity to start over on a foundation of humility and holiness had been wasted – indeed rebuked and scoffed at. See e.g. **Genesis 19:9**. If anything the cities of the plain became even more decadent and consumed by evil after the Holy One sent Avraham to rescue than they had been before the armies of the Eastern kings invaded.

Alas, we are learning through our study of Torah that neither the *intercession* nor the *righteous example* of the most God-fearing man in the world can bring about the salvation of any person or nation whose consciences have been seared by perversion so badly that they *simply do not want to be saved from it*. Lot's wife is an example. But she is by no means the only one. Even Lot resisted every attempt of the Holy One to provide him and his household salvation. Angels had to drag Lot and his family from the city against their will. **Genesis 19:15-18**. It is stunning how much affection even we who should know better maintain in our hearts for the things of this world – things that are bent on destroying us. We seem to especially cling to the familiar icons and institutions of the lawless cultures in which we live. Yes, this is idolatry. Yes, it is real. Yes, it is prevalent. Yes, it will destroy us and our families if we do not turn from it and return to the Holy One and His Ways.

Please Don't Miss the Real Message!

The point of this aliyah is *not* for us to assume a self-righteous air, shake our heads, and *condemn* Lot, his daughters, or even the leaders of Sodom. The sad truth is that we, under similar circumstances, very well might have done even worse. This is particularly true considering the alarming, near-total dependence of most men and women of 'faith' in every age on *other men*, upon *institutions*, and upon *forms of religion*⁵. This abdication of the responsibility for the spiritual life of one's self and one's family and home makes what happened to Lot and his household seem tame.

The glitter, glitz and convenience of 21st Century Cities of the Plain, it seems, have proven just as alluring and anesthetizing to us as Sodom proved to have for Lot. And, if and when we in the 21st Century finally make the move to leave Sodom and Amorah, it seems the relative improvement of 21st Century Tzoars [perhaps typifying so-called "Christian" or "Jewish" or "Messianic" alternatives to worldly forms of activity?] captivates us, and causes us to fixate and stagnate, and still miss the mark⁶. We will accept anything, it seems, besides actually doing what the Holy One's Torah says is our purpose and destiny, the very essence of the reason we were "chosen" – *teaching our children, and our households after us, the way of the Holy One, and to do/make tzedakah and mishpat*. See **Genesis 18:19**. It is not our job - or our place - to condemn Lot. The pot should not call the kettle black. The pleasant 'caves' we have built in 21st Century America, Europe, Africa, etc. are no better than Lot's.

But let us at least learn from Lot's example. The only way of life we can follow is the way of *sh'ma*-ing the Holy One! It is not entertainment, nor is it socialization opportunities, nor is it education or socialization – or more toys or trophies - that our children need. It is not 'self-esteem' or a 'positive self-image' that will prepare them for the crises and challenges of life. Entertainment and socialization, education and 'self-esteem', material wealth and 'self-expression' are all just pipe smoke - different pathways that all lead inexorably to the deep darkness of Lot's cave.

What we and our children need is not better government, better teachers, better schools and churches, a better health care program, or better political systems or

⁵ This is not to condemn any specific form or personage of religion. Every religious form and personage needs to be analyzed in light of Torah, and the standard of Torah truth applied to it/them, but that is a different subject for a different day. What I am talking about here is DEPENDENCE upon such things for spiritual development. The Holy One clearly puts upon heads of households the primary responsibility for spiritually nourishing the members of his household. To delegate this responsibility to ANYONE else is to *lo sh'ma* the Holy One – and borders on spiritual child abuse and neglect.

⁶ It is sort of like leaving Ur of the Chaldees, but then settling in Charan – just on the edge of Chaldean influence – rather than proceeding to the destiny to which we are called. Or, it is like leaving Egypt, but then choosing to wander in the desert rather than enter the promised land to which we have been called.

politicians. All those things are seductive mirages – anesthetizing distractions of human imagination that offer not one whiff of substantive value to the soul. What our children – and we, for that matter – desperately need are *legitimate, God-initiated God-encounters* and life experiences walked out hand-in-Hand with the Holy One rather than according to social custom. What our children and we ourselves need is *engrafting into - and daily drawing strength and wisdom from - the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham.*

Each of us has a *covenant with the Holy One*, a *destiny* and a *purpose*. We cannot [consistently at least] rely on *anyone else* to hear from God for us, or to teach our children His truth, and how to apply it in their lives. We will survive and fulfill our destiny - if at all - by one Way, and one Way alone – *i.e.* by personally seeking, hearing, and heeding, and treasuring, and following, the Words of God. Can others help equip us and our children? Certainly – especially in the very earliest stages of our walk. But each of us has a responsibility to get equipped – and get our children equipped - as fast as possible, then *move on*. Do not be ‘*ever learning, but never knowing the truth*’.

Reality Check

What do you think you would do if our Western world was touched by the Holy One’s judgment the way Lot’s world was? Do you think you would merely escape to another city of the plain, to ply your trade, go to a new religious institution, and/or resume your present lifestyle amongst somewhat less evil people? If so, it’s time for a *reality check*. Surely World Trade Center catastrophes, anthrax-laced packages, school massacres, Beltway snipers, killer tsunamis and Category 4 and 5 hurricanes have awakened us at least that much. Wake up and smell the coffee! As the note left at the scene of the Ponderosa Restaurant, Richmond, Virginia, shooting of America’s so-called ‘Beltway Sniper’ a few years ago, makes it clear:

... *your children are not safe ... anywhere, at any time*⁷

Read that *again*, Dear Reader. Read it *over and over and over again* - until the message sinks in. You see, I do not agree with the guy who wrote that message on very much at all. I certainly do not condone his actions. I am definitely glad he was caught. But the truth of the matter is, for reasons he only partly understood, the words he scribbled on that note ring quite true. The shocking, sickening scandal of the Catholic church⁸ which has been publicly unveiled over the past few years

⁷ This was the message written in the note found by authorities in the wooded area across from the Ponderosa Restaurant off Interstate Highway 95 in Richmond, Virginia, after the October 19, 2002, ‘beltway sniper’ shooting a short time after the sundown that brought Shabbat *Lech Lecha* to a close in Hebrew year 5762.

⁸ The child molestation problem is by no means limited to the Catholic Church. It is – or will be - a problem in every religious – or secular - organization that entrusts children to adults other than Godly parents. Yes, that includes any local church or synagogue or youth group you or kids may attend or wish

should tell us – our children are not safe with ANYONE – even [or perhaps especially⁹] clergymen. Why is this so?

The Non-Delegability of the Duty of Raising Children in the Way They Should Go

The legal world has a term known as ‘**non-delegable duty**’. This means that certain responsibilities simply cannot be delegated – *i.e.* shifted onto the shoulders of anyone else. This means that you can, if you choose, get someone else to do those things for you - **but** if they are not done properly – and they will not be - it is **you**, *not the person you hired*, who will be held primarily responsible and accountable. Spiritually, you see, where your children are concerned the *buck stops with you*. Where *my* children are concerned the buck stops with *me*. Not with the *school system*, the *schoolteacher* or the *school board*. Not with the *coach*. Not with the *priest*, the *pastor* or the *rabbi*. Not with the *youth director*. Not with the *babysitter*. Not with the *peer group*. Not with the *neighbor*. Not with *child-welfare services*. With *me*. With *you*. With *us*.

Oh, how we like to delegate our responsibilities regarding our children to others. And the pagans in charge of the nations in which we live in 21st Century Western Culture assure us we should do just that. But do you remember what your Bible says about “friendship with the world”?

So here is a question on which I urge you to ponder in light of the sad story of Lot and his daughters: if everything fell apart around you today, as it did for Lot, are you and your family prepared to start over with nothing and learn a totally new lifestyle - *a lifestyle totally dependent upon YOUR hearing from and responding to the Holy One*. Are you prepared in case everything changes around you and can never be “fixed”? Perhaps it will never happen, at least in your lives - but perhaps it will. You are well advised to prepare to *leave society as you know it* - as Lot had to. I mean *just in case*. But build your preparations around running *to*, not *from*, the Holy One. He is our shield, and our great reward. He is able to shelter us - and our children – if we will only *sh’ma* His Voice.

A Note of Hope – Even In a Bleak Situation

While what we read in today’s aliyah saddens if not sickens us, it does not alter the Holy One’s inexorable plan for His Creation one whit. The first child born of incest was *Moav* [Moab]. It was from Moav that Ruth descended. It was from Ruth that David descended. It was from David that Messiah descended. All things work

to attend. It also includes sports programs, scouting programs, day care programs, youth camps, and slumber party/sleepovers.

⁹ Because clergymen in our society are often considered by children and youth as extensions of God, who know the ‘Spiritual stuff’, and who thus occupy a position of trust.

together for good for those who love the Holy One, who are called according to His purposes. Never, never, never forget that, Dear Reader!

Questions For Today's Study

1. Torah tells us that Lot was afraid to stay in *Tzoar*.

[A] Why was afraid to stay in Tzoar? Of what specifically was he 'afraid'?

[B] Consider what Avraham saw when he looked in the direction of where the cities of the plain had been. Would you have been 'afraid' to stay in Tzoar?

2. Consider what thoughts must have been in Lot's mind as he decided to leave Tzoar. Put yourself in his position, and write a journal entry for the day he decided to leave Tzoar, expressing how his life had changed since he parted company with Avraham, and how he felt about his past, present, and future. [Hint: Don't forget that Lot had been pretty well off and usually had a lot of people hanging around him - see Genesis 13:5, 13:7, and 14:16]

3. According to Genesis 19:30 where did Lot and his daughters make their home after leaving Tzoar?

4. Why do you think Lot did not go back to live with Avraham, now that he no longer had the flocks, herds, and herdsmen (all apparently died in Sodom) that had caused the need to separate?

5. Why do you think Lot's daughters did what they did? Do you think they considered the Holy One's thoughts and ways before they did what they did? Do you think they prayed or sought wisdom and counsel from the Holy One before doing what they did? Explain what you think was their thought process.

6. In today's Haftarah reading the account of *Elishahu* [Elisha] and the barren woman of *Shunem* [representative of the Holy One's faithful remnant] continues. The inclusion of the story of this woman and her miraculous conception and birth of a son in the TaNaKh is purposeful and prophetic. Not only does the story remind the Holy One's people of where they *came from* [Avraham, Sarah, and their miracle child Yitzchak], but it also points us to where we are "*going*" - because the picture of the annunciation, conception, birth, death and resurrection of the son is prophetic of the annunciation conception, birth, death and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua. The point is that the faithful remnant of the Holy One always appears barren, and is incapable, in itself or its members, of producing the spark of Divine life – *until* the Holy One's Divinely-appointed season! The text of today's passage, in the Hebrew Names Version, reads as follows:

He [Elishahu] *said, "What then is to be done for her?"*
Gechazi answered, "Most assuredly she has no son, and her husband is old."
He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the door.

He said, "At this season, when the time comes round, you will embrace a son."

She said, "No, my lord, you man of God, do not lie to your handmaid."

*The woman conceived, and bore a son at that season,
when the time came round, as Elisha had said to her.*

[A] What was the political and spiritual situation of the Holy One's people when the events described in today's haftarah aliyah took place?

[B] Whose idea was it for the wealthy woman of Shunem to have a son?

[C] Had this woman asked Elishahu [Elisha] or Gechazi for anything?

[D] How is Elishahu's prophesy over the Shunamite similar to the prophesy of the Holy One over Sarah in Genesis 18:14?

7. In today's reading from the apostolic writings Kefa [Peter] continues warning the Holy One's covenant people about false prophets and teachers in their midst. This is not a radical "new" teaching Kefa is expressing. Yeshua taught the same truth in the parables of the *wheat and the tares* [Matthew 13:24 ff] and of *the dragnet* [Matthew 13:47 ff]. The truth is that every community of faith has – or will have - a *false prophet* and/or *false teacher*, just as the Holy One's people have always had to contend with a Kayin, a Lamech, a Lot, an Ishmael, an Esau, a Laban, an Absalom, a Jezebel, and/or a Judas. The servant is not above his master. But it is not our task to accuse, slander, ostracize, or "seek and destroy" the false prophets and teachers, as if we were some kind of self-appointed spiritual policemen. Our task is to focus on Torah truth and *mitzvot*-living, avoid "infection", and let the Holy One deal with the "tares" and "bad fish" among us in His own way and in His own time.

*The Holy One knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation
and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment;
but chiefly those who walk after the flesh in the lust of defilement and despise authority.
Daring, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries;
whereas angels, though greater in might and power,
don't bring a railing judgment against them before the Holy One.*

[A] What according to verse 9 is the difference in the way the Holy One treats *Godly men and women* on the one hand, and *unrighteous people* on the other hand.

[B] How do you think the Holy One distinguishes between "Godly" persons and "unrighteous" persons, for the purpose of making the distinctions discussed in verse 9?

[C] According to the first part of verse 10, judgment is to be especially severe on people who engage in two specific sinful "ways". What are the two specific types of sinful "ways" which will receive the especially severe judgment?

[D] Think about the two sinful "ways" Kefa is warning us about. How can you recognize in yourself the "seed" form of those sinful ways - what types of conduct and attitudes which, if not 'nipped in the bud', do you think will lead to the first such sinful "way"? Answer the same question as to the second sinful "way".

[E] Explain what you think Kefa is talking about in verses 10-11 of today's study. [Hint: Read the rest of II Peter, to put this in context, before you answer!]

*May you be sheltered in the strong arms of the Holy One,
and never depart from His Perfect Will for you.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 140:6-11

*I said to the Holy One, "You are my God."
to the cry of my petitions, O Holy One!*

*O Holy One, the strength of my yeshu`ah –
You have covered my head in the day of battle.*

O Holy one, don't grant the desires of the wicked.

Don't let their evil plans succeed, or they will become proud. Selah.

*As for the head of those who surround me,
let the mischief of their own lips cover them.*

Let burning coals fall on them.

Let them be thrown into the fire; into miry pits from where they never rise.

An evil speaker won't be established in the eretz.

Evil will hunt the violent man to overthrow him.