

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayera:*** Genesis 19:1-29
Haftarah: II Kings 4: 8-13
B'rit Chadasha: II Peter 2:6-8

Hurry! Get out of this place!

[Genesis 19:14]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 140:4-5;

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

Vayavo'u shenei ha-mal'achim Sodomah b'erev - And the two angels arrived at Sodom at the time of evening ... ***v'Lot yoshev b'sha'ar-S'dom*** – and Lot was sitting in Sodom's gate **Genesis 19:1a.**

Is your city/town/village thriving spiritually – or is it in the throes of a spiritual plague? How can you know? Ask yourself these questions: Is the reverent fear of the Holy One a common phenomenon? Is the Torah portion of the week being studied and discussed all around the town? Is excitement about Mashiach rising? Are the halls of government, industry, and commerce flowing with wisdom, kindness, and humility? Are the streets, marketplaces, public squares, and houses filled with joy? Are most adults busy, enthusiastic, and productive at work? Are most children safe wherever they go - at play, in their studies, and in their beds? Are the young men and women keeping themselves pure for marriage? Is it safe for the elderly to walk the streets of their neighborhood, or go to the market? How are widows, the fatherless, the poor, and strangers treated and/or cared for? These factors tell the Holy One all He needs to know about an individual's, society's, culture's and/or community's values and priorities.

People of Sodom, meet a group of strangers! Be on your best behavior now - this is going to be the ultimate pass-or-fail test! Who are the strangers that the Holy One is about to introduce to Sodom? They are the same angelic messengers who recently spent a night in Avraham's camp. Because the Holy One was cherished and revered at Avraham and Sarah's tents, His messengers enjoyed nothing but honor there. They were greeted warmly. They were served humbly. They were loved extravagantly. From bringing them water to wash their feet; to finding them a shady place to sit, rest, and talk; to killing the fatted calf and providing a meal fit for a royal table; to serving them course after course of the absolute best he had,

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Avraham pulled out all the stops to make them feel at home. But they are in for quite a culture shock. The people of Sodom follow a very different model of behavior in regard to strangers who wander their way!

Alas, very few people in the world welcome strangers the way Avraham did; and it is difficult to find any city built by men that offers anything even remotely similar to the safe harbor of *shalom* that Avraham's little tent village provided. But there are lines, limits, and minimum standards of decency; and those lines and limits can never be crossed, or those minimum standards of decency ignored, without serious repercussions.

Toxic Exploitation Patterns of Narcissistic Behavior that Identify City-Tower-and-Name Obsessed, Way-of-Cham Embracing People

When Lot set up residence in the Jordan River Valley, the Writer of Torah made a point of telling us that: ***the men of Sodom were ra'im*** – i.e. *self-obsessed to the ultimate degree* - ***and chata'im*** – i.e. *off-target to the ultimate degree* – ***in relation to the Holy One***. Genesis 13:13. Because the Holy One chooses to look at people through a Redeemer's eyes of grace instead of a critic's eyes of condemnation, statements like you just read are exceedingly rare in Holy Writ. Such an assessment should never be tossed aside lightly. Such a description means that a group of people have individually and collectively crossed a line – and become so toxic to others and to the Great Ecosystem that there can be no redemption. Such a statement guarantees that grace has been offered time and time again, but has in each case been violently rejected, such that the offer of grace now absolutely has to be taken off the table - *not for the sake of wrath or vengeance, but for the greater good of Creation*. We haven't seen anything remotely similar to this in the scroll of Torah since right before the Flood. See Genesis 6:6, 11-12. We will not see it again until Pharaoh declares it over himself and his people in Exodus 9:27².

What exactly will the angels find in Sodom? Has Lot's presence in that city had any impact on the other residents? Did the miraculous return of all the wealth that the Kings of the North pillaged from the city awaken anyone to the goodness of the Holy One? Or will the men of Sodom still be the same *ra'im* and *chata'im* they were back in Genesis 13:13. Ah, Beloved, honorable men should not talk about³ what the angels are going to find when they got to Sodom. So, let's talk instead about *what they will not find*. They will not find the ten righteous men Avraham

² In Exodus 9:27, after the sign of fire mixed with hail, Pharaoh called Moshe and Aharon, and said: *I have incited sin [chata]. The Holy One is righteous, and I am my people are wicked [rasha'im]*.

³ According to Ezekiel 16:49, the sins of the people of Sodom were "***gaon*** [KJV *pride*, literally ornamentation; self-glorying]; ***shivat lechem*** [KJV *fullness of food*]; ***and abundance of sakat*** [KJV *idleness*; literally, *leisure, laying around*]; *neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy; and they were **haughty and committed abomination before Me.***"

referenced in his ‘negotiations’ with the Holy One over the fate of Lot’s city – indeed, they will not find anyone acting the least bit like they were created in the image of the Holy One to act. They will not find a single person, save Lot, who honors any part of the Covenant the Holy One cut with humankind and with the earth after the Flood. They will not find a hint of the reverent fear of the Creator who gives them life. They will not find a whisper of praise, a syllable of thanksgiving, or a thimbleful of kindness. Neither will they find a milliliter of humility. Though they walk up down Sodom’s *boulevard of a thousand perversions* for hours – or, for that matter, decades - they will not hear a single blessing spoken or a solitary word of life proclaimed. They will not see a single story of selfless service unfold. Every person, of every age, gender, economic status, and cultural background that they encounter will be toxically self-obsessed, hyper-emotional, easily offended, always outraged, lustful, greedy, class-envious, hate-consumed, paranoid, violent, uncleanness-embracing, and unclean spirit possessed. They will see debauchery beyond imagination not only tolerated but loudly touted as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. They will see pathological and abusive behaviors openly and exuberantly celebrated. The stench of both physical filth and spiritual uncleanness they encounter on Sodom’s streets will be nauseating. The cackling laughter of unclean spirits they hear will be deafening. They will immediately recognize that not a single neighborhood, street, or meeting place in that city is safe for human occupation. They will soon know beyond a shadow of a doubt – and report to Heaven - that not a soul in this entire city is interested in *teshuvah*– or ever will be. This is not going to be pretty. Indeed, to anyone who knows Sodom at all, for two angels – or men – to arrive there at evening can only turn out one way. But the angels had been briefed. They knew all about all that well in advance. All possible scenarios had been discussed in great detail and planned for before the angels left the Throne Room. They were under no illusions as to what they would encounter on this trip. An ‘outcry’ had come up against the people of this city. According to Heaven’s rules of engagement and due process, however, an emotionally charged outcry by an alleged victim, in and of itself, is never, ever enough to justify either [a] forming a critical opinion or [b] imposing a judgment. From Heaven’s viewpoint, before any opinion can be reached – much less any judgment decreed or imposed - there absolutely must be two or more credible, disinterested witnesses who verify the truth of the outcry through personal observation.

Witnesses, meet Sodom! Sodom, meet the witnesses. The future of mankind – and for that matter, the entire ecosystem that we know as ‘earth – hinged upon Sodom and its sister cities of the Plain being destroyed. As the sages of Israel say: *To be*

*merciful to the cruel is to be cruel to the merciful*⁴. Heaven had decreed that the inhabitants of these cities had crossed a point of no return. They had become so corrupt, perverse, violent, and cruel, and were doing so much damage to the ecosystem, that an extinction level event was the only option.

Not Safe for Man, For Beast, or Even For Angels!

For a just a few moments the Holy One is going to pull back His Protective Hand from one geographical area – one sphere of influence. The region in question – the hotbed of toxicity that had to be dealt with – was the region where the twin Kena’ani cities of *Sodom* and *Amorah/Gomorrah* were situated. This was, of course, the area in which Lot and his herdsmen had chosen to settle a few years previously. That area, those cities, and their people had been pouring forth perversion in staggering quantities for generations. The cities there had become cesspools of the most toxic forms of human thought and behavior possible. But is that why the Holy One removed His protective Hand from them? Or is there something else – something ultimately much more insidious, than the perversion of pagans? Is it perhaps what the area was *devoid of*, rather than what it was *full of*, that necessitated this drastic intervention from Heaven?

Where Are the Tzadikim?

The Holy One is no prude; nor is He by any means a stranger to human perversion. He has been forgiving men of every kind of sin, iniquity, and rebellion for generations. He has been pouring out mercy and grace to heal and restore fallen man since long before places like *Sodom* existed. He has been sending rain on the unjust along with the just for hundreds – if not thousands – of years since the Great Flood. When the Emori [Amorites] and Kena’ani [Canaanites] turned the cities of the Jordan Rift Valley into hellholes of *corrupt thought, destructive emotion, hate-filled speech, and deviate behavior* He saw it unfolding – and did not forcibly stop it. He also, however, did not sit idly by and do nothing. Because He cared, He sent Kingdom ambassadors to the region in waves to offer the people there a better option – and a better result. His first offer – and second, and third – is always redemption. The first Kingdom ambassador the Holy One sent to this area to offer a better way was *Melki-Tzedek*, the great *kohen* [Kingdom Ambassador; Royal Emissary; official representative; priest], whom the Holy One sent to the nearby city of ‘*Salem*’ to bless and pray for the entire geographical region. When the people of the Plain did not respond to Melki-Tzedek’s inspiring presence or his humble, patient intercession, the Holy One upped the ante. He sent Avraham to the area as well, to interact with the residents of *Sodom* as a trading partner and model the ways of Kingdom Righteousness to them. The Holy One thereby provided *Sodom* and its

⁴ The quote is referenced in several rabbinical sources, most notably in Maimonides classic work ‘*The Guide of the Perplexed*’, Part 3, Chapter 39.

sister cities/suburbs with direct exposure to a human being who demonstrated the humility and wisdom that flows from intimate communion with the Creator of the Universe. Then came the third wave. To sweeten the offer of redemption, the Holy One then arranged for Lot and his family to become embedded in the region. Lot had walked with Avraham for years – and the plan had been for him to *model tzedekah*⁵ and *mishpat*⁶ to the men of the area on a day-in, day-out basis. Surely Lot could awaken a hunger for the righteous ways of the Holy One in at least a few of the townspeople. Surely he, his wife, and his daughters, showing kindness, gentleness, and mercy, could inspire at least ... well, surely TEN would not be too many to expect.

Moreover, the Holy One did not leave His messengers without some really intriguing things to talk about. He sent a series of stern, attention-getting warnings. First, He pulled back his Hand of blessing on the area and allowed a famine to settle on the area; then came two separate invasions by the armies of the North. In the latter situation He caused all eyes in the region to fall on His servant Avraham – who miraculously rescued the captives of the cities of the Plain, then selflessly returned all the wealth that had been plundered from the invading armies. If that sign, wonder, and humility show did not get the attention of the people of the plain,

⁵ *Tzedekah* is usually translated into English inartfully as either ‘righteousness’ or ‘charity’. Hebraically, however, to model *tzedekah* requires learning to use the Author/Designer of the Project’s design specifications as the filter through which one looks at, relates to, and works with all the people, places, time periods, and things that come into in one’s sphere of influence. It means to show both unique personal types of creativity and subordination to the Author/Designer’s Vision and Plan, for the common good. It means, with regard to all people, places, time periods, and things the Holy One brings into your zone of impact, to choose to think, speak, react, and behave in ways that will help make the Author’s vision for those people, places, time periods, and things come an efficient, sustainable state of harmony and functionality. Conversely, it means not to judge any person, place, time period, or thing prematurely, or try to redesign same to suit one’s own tastes or to further one’s own self-interest but instead to collaborate with and facilitate whatever the Holy One is trying to construct in the person, place, time, and/or thing in question. The key to *tzedekah* is real-time, hands-on, solution/resolution focused Kingdom-building engagement and activity, as opposed to wasting time and energy talking/arguing/pontificating about abstractions, ideas, theories, concepts, opinions, principles, morals, or value judgments.

⁶ Usually translated into English as either ‘justice’ or ‘judgment’, *mishpat* means the development, issuance, publication, administration, enforcement, and oversight of royal decrees designed bring about the purposes and policies of the King. To model *mishpat*’ is thus means to employ, for the good of specific people, places, time periods, and creatures, a functional infrastructure that gathers and processes information/data, and makes decisions, through the lens of, and implements those decisions in practical ways that support and advance the King’s announced short- and long-term Plans and agenda. See Psalm 89:14a: *Tzedekah and mishpat are the foundation of Your Throne*. And see Psalm 119:149b: *O Holy One, revive me according to Your mishpat*. To ‘*asah mishpat*’ is therefore to join the Holy One in doing whatever He has decreed should be done in the given situation, advancing His Plan for the Redemption of Mankind and the Restoration of Creation. The goal of *mishpat* is never blame or punishment, but always redemption, restoration, and what it will take to get past the obstacles, challenges, offenses, attitudes, and emotions that stand in the way, and move the King’s agenda forward.

and give Lot and his family a glorious Divine Redemption story to talk about with their neighbors ... well what would?

There is None So Blind As He Who Refuses to Even Look

Alas, the people of the Jordan Rift Valley paid no attention to the signs. They failed to be wowed or woo-ed by the grand story of redemption the Holy One, through Avraham and 318 shepherders, had wrought for them. They failed to take advantage of the mercies shown to them or inquire further regarding the Author of those mercies. They chose to respond to the Holy One's acts of lovingkindness by indulging themselves in - and filling the world with - ever more virulent forms of self-indulgence, perversion, narcissism, rage, hate, oppression, and violence. Somewhere along the way they crossed the *point of no repentance*. There were not TEN TZADIKIM. There was no beachhead from which a culture-changing move of Kingdom redemption and restoration could be launched.

The land was swimming in innocent blood. Creation was languishing under the curses being spoken by the witches and warlocks, not to mention the demagogues and ideologues, of Sodom and Amorah. Night and day the growing multitudes of innocent victims of the hate, the rage, the violence, and the deviance of the cities of the plain cried out, '*How Long?*' And the Holy One has heard those cries - and was prepared to respond with surgical precision to alleviate the suffering that had given birth to those cries. He had offered mercy, time and time again; time and time again it had been rejected. The cities of the plain - and their inhabitants - had chosen self-obsession and perversion as their portion. It had now become clear: they were not going to change. Indeed, they were just going to get worse - and cause more and more damage to the rest of the world.

Soon, therefore, for the sake of the survival of the planet and its inhabitants, the Holy One is going to step out of the way. He is going to let the Heavens rain down fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Amorah. Before He does this, however, Torah is going to make certain that we understand exactly WHY those cities had to be destroyed - and give anyone who wants out of those perverse cities one final chance to escape. In case any uninformed soul should ever have any doubts about why this kind of a season of destruction was necessary - and will one day be necessary again - come along with the Rabbi's son now, and let's spend *a night at Lot's house*. Welcome ... to the *Hotel California*⁷ - *on layer-after-layer and overdose-upon-overdose of steroids!*

A Night at Lot's House

⁷ The reference is to a popular soft-rock song by that name performed by a group called 'The Eagles' in the late 1970's.

In yesterday's readings the Holy One and Avraham engaged in a lengthy and fascinating conversation concerning what was happening in the nearby region of Sodom and Amorah where Lot and his family lived. It all started when the Holy One told Avraham:

*Because the outcry against Sodom and Amorah is great, and because their sin is very grave,
I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether
according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.*

[Genesis 18:20-21]

Avraham did his best to intercede on Lot's and the cities' behalves, yet even he had to concede in the course of the negotiations he conducted with the Holy One that if the evil running rampant in those cities had reached the point where less than ten tzadikim remained there the result would be that the spiritual atmosphere in those cities would simply become too toxic to the rest of the world for it to be allowed to continue.

Today's aliyah begins by announcing that the Holy One has sent two angelic messengers to Sodom to serve as His inspection team. Torah is about to tell us that these angelic messengers sent by the Holy One were about to *spend a night at Lot's house*. And in the course of that one fateful night they are going to see *all they need to see*, and more. Indeed, the angelic visitors the Holy One sent as His Ambassadors and Beit Din are going to document beyond question that the outcry being raised against Sodom is **100% true**. Indeed, if anything they will find the outcry was *grossly understated*. They are going to discover that the level of hate and perversion in those cities, and the devastating influence that hate and perversion are leaching into the world, are far worse than any human being alive today could possibly imagine.

Ah, but we are getting ahead of ourselves, aren't we. Let's go back and pick up the action as Torah describes it for us.

Enter the Malachim

As the curtain rises on today's aliyah the angels are just arriving in town. Torah records what happened upon their arrival at the city's gate as follows:

v'Lot yoshev b'sha'ar-Sodom

And Lot was sitting at the city gate

vayar-Lot v'yakom likratam v'yishtachu apayim ar'tzah

Lot saw them and got up to greet them, bowing with his face to the ground.

[Genesis 19:1]

Note that Lot, though presumably in a crowded city gate, appears to be the only person there who welcomed the *malachim*. Lot ran to them the way Avraham had. He bowed his face to the ground before them as Avraham had. And he invited

them to his dwelling. His invitation was: *suru na el-beit avdeichem v'linu* – turn aside to the house of your servant and lodge [the night] with us ... *v'rachatzu ragleichem* – and wash your feet ... *v'hishkamtem v'halachtem l'darkeichem* – and rise early and continue on your way **Genesis 19:2.**

Lot apparently does not want these Heavenly visitors to see much of Sodom. He seems to want them *out of circulation*, and *out of town*. He knows that nothing good will happen if they stick around. Lot surely knows his city *very, very well* – having witnessed its perversions firsthand for years. He knows that if the *malachim* see for themselves what demonic spawns the people of the city have become, well ... if that happens, his city will be **TOAST!** And of course, all the personal wealth and social status he, his wife, and his daughters have created in their resort city of choice will be ‘toast’ right along with it.

We are not told of Lot’s thoughts or motivations at this point. I suspect, however, that he has grown to care a great deal about the city in which he lives. Perhaps he has prayed for its welfare. And thus for a multitude of reasons he does NOT under any circumstances want the level of judgment he knows his city and its inhabitants deserves to be released. He has *too much invested* in Sodom – financially, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually - to just let that happen ... at least without an intervention. As the song says - *we are all just prisoners here – of our own device*. So, when the angels politely decline his invitation to spend the night at his home, preferring to stay in the open square, Lot *argued* with them. As Torah puts it:

Vayiftzar-bam me'od

He urged them greatly,

vayasuru elav vayavo'u el-beyto

and they came in with him and entered into his house.

vaya'as lahem mishteh umatzot afah vayocheilu

He made them a meal, and baked matzah⁸, and they ate.

[Genesis 19:3]

In the preceding aliyah of Torah these same *malachim* – then called *anashim* - visited Avraham’s tent. You may wish to compare the hospitality they received there with the hospitality they receive from Lot. Lot definitely takes them in and feeds them, as did Avraham, but Lot’s *motive* and his *enthusiasm* – not to mention the *menu* he offers – seem to pale in comparison. Because Lot is said to have served *matzah* [i.e. *unleavened bread*] **to** the *malachim*, a *midrash* has developed that the angelic visit took place on 14 Nisan – the evening of Passover [the night on which in a future generation the death angel would ‘pass over’ the houses of B’nei Yisrael and take the

⁸ Hence there is a rabbinical tradition that this episode occurred on the date we now celebrate as Passover, as a prophetic reference to the events of the night of the plague of the firstborn of Egypt.

lives of the firstborn of Egypt]. Perhaps. Or perhaps Lot just hastily threw together the quickest meal he could in an effort to keep the *malachim* from wandering around the town square and seeing what the city was like while dinner was cooking. It is, of course, impossible to say for sure.

The Events That Seal Sodom's Fate Begin To Unfold

The depth of the perversion of Sodom is clearly demonstrated to the angelic Beit Din by events that began to unfold even before Lot could hustle the *malachim* off to bed. According to Torah:

Terem yishkavu v'anshei ha-ir

... before they lay down, the men of the city,

anshei Sodom nasabu al-ha-bayit

the men of Sodom, surrounded the house,

mina'ar v'ad-zaken

both young and old

kol-ha-am mikatzeh

all the people from every quarter.

Vayikre'u el-Lot vayomru

They called to Lot and said to him,

lo ayeh ha-anashim asher-ba'u eleicha ha-laylah

"Where are the men who came into you this night?"

hotzi'em eleinu v'neidei'ah otam

Bring them out to us, that we may [have carnal knowledge of] them."

[Genesis 19:4-5]

Alas, Lot's plans to keep the angels from seeing the evil of the city firsthand, and releasing appropriate judgment, are unsuccessful. The evil most definitely *does not limit itself to the city square*. No place is safe from it. Not even Lot's own house, it turns out. Take heed, Dear Reader!

The Extent of the Evil Exposed - For All To See

And please take note that this perversion was not limited to a few rowdy troublemakers. Who was it that we are told surrounded Lot's house? Who was it that we are told demanded to have their perverse way with Lot's visitors? Torah tells us it was:

anshei ha-ir - *The men of the city ...*

mina'ar v'ad-zaken - *both young and old,*

kol-ha-am mikatzeh - *All the people, from every quarter.*"

[Genesis 19:4]

All. From every quarter. Young and old. That's pretty plain, isn't it. There is *none righteous* – no, not one.

Back when Avraham had discussed the situation in Sodom with the Holy One he had assumed that there would at least be a core group of at least ten *tzadikim* - ones who model *zedekah* – a *minyan* as it were - the presence of whom would justify preserving the mostly perverse city in hopes a small foothold of Kingdom potential there could be used by the Holy One to bring about a radical transformation. But the truth of the matter, as the angels were about to document plainly, was that there were nowhere close to ten *tzadikim* left in the area. The Holy One knew this all the time of course – yet He had politely let Avraham keep babbling on, thinking he was negotiating on behalf of ten non-existent 'righteous' men in Sodom. You see, Dear Reader, *young, old*, it just didn't matter. *Rich* neighborhood, *poor* neighborhood, *middle class* neighborhood - it was all the same. Liberals as well as conservatives; anarchists as well as law-and-order advocates; heterosexuals as well as homosexuals; peasants as well as professionals. All skin colors; all ethnicities; all creeds; all nationalities; all economic sectors. Everyone. *All residents of the plain* – even the men with whom Lot had contracted to be betrothed to his daughters – had bought into a mindset and lifestyle of *self-obsession and sensuality* that knew no bounds. Evil had been allowed to take control. All that mattered to the men of Sodom – whether they were rich, poor, middle-class, and of whatever background - was that there was some '*fresh meat*' in town. And like vultures they now *gathered, one and all*, to participate in the goriest of feasts.

Lot Resorts to the 'Nuclear Option'

Secondly, note how Lot responded when the men of Sodom asked him to '*bring them out*' to them so that they could impose their will on them and satisfy their lust. Lot just wanted the revelers to *go away* – at any cost – even at the cost of sacrificing *his own daughters*. Though the angels certainly needed – and asked - no protection from these people, Lot nevertheless offered to sacrifice his virgin daughters to the perverse use of the men of the city. Why was Lot willing to do this? Was it to save the angels [who, of course, did not need saving] – or was it imply in a last-ditch effort to *keep the angels from releasing on the city the judgment the Holy One had decreed for it*? Whatever his motivation, Lot went outside and told the mob:

Hineh-na li sh'tei v'not asher-lo yade'u ish
I have two daughters who have never known a man.

otziah-na eiten aleichem v'asu lahen katov b'eyneichem
I will bring them out to you. Do as you please with them.
[Genesis 19:8]

Was Lot really willing to sacrifice his daughters to the lust of the perverse men of Sodom just to *maintain his lifestyle and his standing in the community*. That bothers me greatly. Still – I must acknowledge, I have never had to walk in Lot’s sandals. And I wonder – how many of us do *virtually the same thing as Lot* every day, casting our precious daughters and sons adrift on the cesspool of our own modern culture’s perversions to be *leered at, used for sordid selfish purposes*, and then *thrown away*? Is anyone listening?

The Beginning of the End

Alas Lot’s compromise was to no avail anyway. You see, nothing is “enough” for men like that, of whom perversion has taken control. They want it *all* - and they will *take it*, by force if necessary. There is ***no hope of reaching any compromise with truly evil men***, because evil men **hold nothing sacred** but their lusts ***respect no boundaries*** and ***have no conscience***. And so we read:

Vayomru gesh-hal'ah

'Get out of the way!' they shouted.

vayomeru ha-echad ba-l'gur

They were saying, 'This one man came here as a foreigner,

Vayish'pot shafot

and now all of a sudden, he has set himself up as a judge!

atah nara lecha mehem

We'll give it to you worse than to them!

Vayif'tzeiru va'ish b'Lot me'od

They pushed against Lot very much,

vayigshu lish'bor ha-dalet

and tried to break down the door.

At this the ***malachim*** of the Holy One *spring into action*. They strike every man in Sodom [other than Lot] *blind*. They then do an amazing thing: they actually give Lot *one more chance* before the judgment hits to convince anyone over whom he thinks he has influence in the city to *give it all up* and *to flee*.

Alas Lot quickly discovers he has influence over *not one single person* - not even the men to whom he had contracted to betroth his daughters.

Vayetze Lot vayedaber el-chatanav lokeichei v'notav

Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were betrothed to his daughters.

vayomer kumu tzei'u min-ha-makom hazeh

He said, 'Get up! Get out of this area!

ki-mashchit Adonai et-ha-ir

The Holy One is about to lay the city waste!'

vayehi chimeitzachek b'eynei chatanav

To his sons-in-law, it was all a big joke.

The men closest to Lot, it turned out, all thought Lot was ‘a joke’. And sad to say *they were right*. So it was down to just Lot, his wife, and his daughters. Here is how Torah describes the instructions given to Lot concerning them:

Ucheimo ha-shachar alah v'aya'itzu ha-mal'achim b'Lot l'emor

When the morning arose, then the angels hurried Lot, saying,

kum kach et-ishteicha v'et-shtei v'noteicha

"Arise, take your wife, and your two daughters who are here,

ha-nimtza'ot pen-tisafeh b'avon ha-ir

lest you be consumed in the iniquity of the city."

Lot however simply cannot bear to leave. He has grown emotionally attached. It will take a lot more than a *lech lecha* word for him to overcome inertia of ‘status quo attraction’.

Lot Has to be Evacuated Forcibly, Against His Will

Even the ‘tongues of angels’ cannot convince Lot to leave his beloved city of perversion. He simply refuses to *sh'ma*. As Torah tells us:

*But he lingered; and the men laid hold on his hand and on the hand of his wife,
and on the hand of his two daughters, the Holy One being merciful to him;
and they took him out and set him outside of the city.*

The *malachim* have to grab Lot by the arm and *forcibly remove* him. They literally save him *against his will*. And even that does not awaken humility or gratitude.

Lot Argues With the Holy One

As soon as the *malachim* got Lot out of the city limits, they gave him instructions as to what to do and where to go to complete the salvation he was being offered.

*It came to pass, when they had taken them out, that he said, "Escape for your life!
Don't look behind you, neither stay anywhere in the plain.
Escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed!"*

But Lot son of Charan would have none of it. Surely there *was another way*, he insisted. Surely there was a way he could hold on to the wealth he had found in Sodom – like maybe in a little town just up the road? Here is how Torah recounts Lot’s response to his second miraculous salvation experience in as many *parshot*:

*Lot said to them, "Oh, not so, my lord.
See now, your servant has found favor in your sight,
and you have magnified your lovingkindness,
which you have shown to me in saving my life.*

I can't escape to the mountain, lest evil overtake me, and I die.

*See now, this city is near to flee to, and it is a little one.
Oh let me escape there (isn't it a little one?), and my soul will live."*
[Genesis 19:19-20]

That *does it*. The angels are out of it. The Holy One intervenes personally, and says to Lot:

*Behold, I have granted your request concerning this thing also,
that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.
Hurry, escape there, for I can't do anything until you get there.*
[Genesis 19:21-22]

The Holy One exhibits *incredible patience* with Lot. All for the sake of a young lady of Lot's bloodline, yet to be born, whose name shall be called Ruth.

Lot Safely Arrives at Tzo'ar Before the Destruction Comes

I grew up with a mental picture of Lot and his family running out of Sodom as the fire and brimstone were falling, as the tar pits were exploding, and as the sulfur and salt were bursting forth from the earth. I pictured Lot's wife stopping just for a second as she cleared the city limits of Sodom, and hurriedly casting a glance backward at the destruction, then turning into salt. But that is simply not how it happened. The Holy One waited for Lot and his family not just to *get out* of Sodom – but to *get to complete safety* in Tzoar. Not one tar pit exploded, not one fragment of brimstone, sulfur or salt fell, and not one flame of fire touched Sodom until Lot and his family—including his infamous wife – were *completely out of harm's way*.

After Lot and his family were safely deposited in their chosen place of refuge in Tzoar, still nothing happened in Sodom until the following sunrise. Only then did the Holy One allow the judgment to commence. Talk about mercy, grace, and covenant faithfulness. For Torah tells us:

Ha-shemesh yatza al-ha-aretz v'Lot ba Tzo'arah
The sun was risen on the eretz, and Lot was at Tzo'ar.

V'Adonai himtir al-Sodom v'al-Amorah gofrit
And then the Holy One rained on Sodom and on `Amorah

v'esh m'et Adonai min-ha-shamayim
sulfur and fire from the Holy One out of the sky.

V'yahafoch et-he'arim ha-El v'et kol-ha-kikar
He overthrew those cities, and all the plain,

v'et kol-yoshvei he'arim
and all the inhabitants of the cities,

v'tzemach ha-adamah
and that which grew on the ground.

[Genesis 19:24-25]

For Lot's wife it was not enough. She had been delivered. She was free and clear. She was safe. She should have been tucked away safely in the inn at Tzoar. But she couldn't bear the loss of Sodom and her lifestyle there. How she got away from Lot, how far she got from the inn at Tzoar where the Holy One's angels had safely tucked her away the night before, and how far back toward Sodom she ran before 'it' happened, we are not told. Here is all we know: *Vatabet ishto me'acharav* – *But his wife looked back from behind him ... vatehi netziv melach* – *and she became a pillar of salt. Genesis 19:26.*

Such is the tragedy of Lot's wife. Oh that we and our children may learn to never reject so great a salvation as the Holy One our God and faithful covenant partner has wrought for us. We are called by the Master to be *the salt of the earth*. May we never be content to harden into a mere *standing pillar of salt instead*. What is the difference, you ask? A standing pillar of salt is a lifeless lump of unrefined sodium chloride which stands as a testimony of *grace rejected and forfeited and destiny unfulfilled*; the salt of the earth, on the other hand, is a clump of the same substance which the Holy One has taken in His Hands, broken into pieces, ground to fine dust, filtered for impurities, and scattered wherever He thinks it is needed.

Remember 'The Outcry'?

Remember that in yesterday's aliyah of Torah the Holy One had advised his friend Avraham:

***The outcry against Sodom and Amorah is so great
and their sin is so grievous that I will go down and see
if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me.***

[Genesis 18:20-21]

Did you ever wonder where the **outcry** referenced in this verse came from, who uttered it, or of what it consisted? Consider the "outcry" to which the Holy One says He was responding [see the verses quoted above - Genesis 18:20-21]. It was surely not an outcry for mercy, as it clearly called out for, and resulted in, judgment. Is it possible that Lot may have been "sent", by circumstances arranged by the Holy One, to Sodom, to raise up a harvest of righteousness - or to bring the inevitable judgment of the Holy One upon the city?

If you look at the Biblical usages of the word our English Bibles translate as 'outcry' you will begin to understand. The word refers to *screams of anguish*, uttered by victims of violence. Sodom and Amorah were not just *sinful*. They were *torture chambers*.

***AT WHAT POINT Does Humanity's Sin
Bring About the Holy One's Surgical Hand of Judgment?***

Today's aliyah brings up an interesting point. What type and what degree of evil will cause the Holy One to send judgment? All one has to do is read today's aliyah to be convinced that Sodom was irredeemable, and wholly given to evil. But what about New York City, San Francisco, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Dallas, and Johannesburg? What about Los Angeles, New Orleans, London, Bangkok, Bonn, Cape Town, Mexico City, Manila, Peking and Paris? What about Texarkana? What about the cities all of us know, where we or our relatives live and trade? What keeps these cities from the judgment they deserve? There are many *theories* of course. Some say it is *our prayers* and our *groanings of intercession* that staves off judgment. Others say it is *the presence in each of those cities of a scattering of those who seek the Holy One's righteousness* in the midst of the evil - that very scattering being a manifestation of the mercy of the Holy One. Still others say it is *just not 'time'* on the Holy One's calendar for such judgments to rain down.

It is interesting that instantly Avraham knew what the result of a visit to Sodom by the *malachim* the Holy One had sent would be. He responded to the Holy One in yesterday's aliyah: *Will you sweep away the tzadik with the rasha?* Genesis 18:23. Avraham must have known Sodom and Amorah pretty well. He did not take time to ponder if the people in those cities were really as wicked as "reported". He knew that, if anything, they were worse. So before Avraham Avinu let the Holy One leave he tried to negotiate around what he in his heart knew was the only just decision the Holy One could make. All he thought to ask for the Holy One granted. It was not enough.

Avraham Surveys the Aftermath

And when it was all over Avraham knew exactly what to expect. He got up the next morning and immediately went to look in the direction of the cities of the plain to see what, if anything, was left.

*Avraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Holy One.
He looked toward Sodom and `Amorah,
and toward all the land of the plain, and looked
and saw that the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace.*

[Genesis 19:28-29]

Hotel California, it seems, has *burned down*. As the song says: "You can check out any time you like - but you can never leave."

The Strange Case of Lot's 'Righteousness'

In today's B'rit Chadasha reading from II Kefa [Peter], in the context of a drash Kefa writes to us about the sure punishment which awaits false prophets and false teachers that raise their voices in the Messianic fellowship, Kefa pontificates a little about Lot - and about the reasons the Holy One released a strategic strike of judgment on Sodom and Amorah. Here is what Kefa says on the subject:

... and turning the cities of Sodom and `Amorah into ashes,
 [the Holy One] condemned them to destruction,
 having made them an example to those who would live ungodly;
 and [He] delivered **righteous Lot**, who was very **distressed by the lustful life of the wicked**.
 For that **righteous man** dwelling among them, was tormented in his **righteous soul**
 from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds ...
[II Peter 2:6-8]

We know, of course, from reading the Torah that Avraham was *far from perfect*. We also know that Lot was by no means *as tzedek as Avraham*. How then can Kefa, even in the course of a *drash* on false prophets and false teachers, ascribe ‘tzedekah’ to **Lot**? What level of tzedekah are we to believe, based upon reading this, that Lot possessed?

We are, of course, not to assume that Lot was seen by the Holy One as having the same level of tzedekah *as Avraham* [to whom tzedekah was credited in connection with his ‘*aman*’-ing of the Holy One]. Nor are we to assume that Lot was seen by the Holy One as having the same level of tzedekah *as Noach* [blameless in his generation]. At best, based upon what we have seen, it appears Lot had in the Holy One’s eyes [a] some level of *imputed tzedekah* received by reason of his relationship with and former period of close association with Avraham, and [b] the level of *personal tzedekah* that stops short of adopting the *sh’ma* lifestyle for oneself and one’s family, but *at least recognizes, and is grieved by, the unholy trinity of ra⁹, mish’chat¹⁰, and chamas¹¹ in their most egregious forms*. After all, the only thing we are told about the level of tzedekah Lot was seen by the Holy One as having is that Lot “*was very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked, and was tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds.*”

Hmmmmn. There is a great lesson to be learned from Torah’s description of Lot’s ‘*righteousness*’, Dear Reader. The level of *tzedekah* with which Lot is credited as having appears to be a level quite inferior to that of Avraham, whom the Holy One knew [and who knew the Holy One] intimately, who ‘*taught his children and his household to keep the way of the Holy One, and asah tzedekah and mishpat*’. The

⁹ *Ra* is usually translated into English inartfully as ‘evil’; it just means self-absorption.

¹⁰ *Mish’chat* is usually translated into English as ‘corruption’, but it refers to 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*].

¹¹ *Chamas* is usually translated into English as ‘violence’, but *it* 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.

level of tzedekah with which Lot is credited is a level that *tends to make its possessor miserable instead of blessed*. Instead of yielding *shalom* [peace, wholeness, harmony, and well-being], joy, hope, love, faithfulness and goodness, health and life, the level of ‘righteousness’ Lot exemplified yields only ‘distress’ [i.e. *he ... was very distressed ...*] and ‘torment’ [i.e., *he ... was tormented in his righteous soul*].

The righteousness of Lot, it appears, is like that of a man or woman who has *tasted of the goodness of the Holy One*, and had *walked in His covenant for awhile*, but who sadly *cannot bring himself to surrender to it wholeheartedly*. The ‘righteousness’ of Lot appears to be that of a person who *truly loves the things of the Holy One ... but* who, alas, finds he or she *loves the things of the world just a little bit more* - and thus, though he or she *fully believes in the one true God and willingly acknowledges the superiority of His just and true ways*, still chooses to live a *personal life full of compromises*.

Here is the point. *What good did it do for Lot, for his family, or for the world, for Lot to be ‘very distressed by the lustful life of the wicked’ and to be ‘tormented in his righteous soul from day to day with seeing and hearing lawless deeds ... ?’* What good does it do for us, for our families, or for the world, for us to share Lot’s distress and torment over the lustful lives lived and the lawless deeds done in our world? What good is such a form of ‘righteousness’ indeed? Ah, but there is a *better way*. There is a much, much *deeper level of tzedekah* than Lot ever knew. There is a kind of *tzedekah* that, though far short of perfection, is full of *joy and blessedness and goodness and hope and peace*. There is a kind of *tzedekah* that rings with sounds of *laughter*, and *bears much fruit*. If you have not found such a kind of *tzedekah*, Dear Reader, I offer these words of counsel: *Sell all you have - and surrender all you think you know - to find it*. And when you have found it embrace it with all your strength, and *walk in it* all the days of your life. And if you will do this Beloved you will, even without intending to, *teach it to your children* – just like our father Avraham did.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. At what point do you think Lot recognized that the men who came to his city were angels of the Holy One. Explain your answer by listing the events that occurred [verses 1-14] and stating why you think Lot did or did not recognize that the men were angels of the Holy One when those events occurred.
2. After the wickedness of the men of Sodom [Sodom] was clearly demonstrated in connection with the incident at Lot’s house, the angelic messengers told Lot their mission was to bring about Sodom’s destruction.

[A] Explain the question asked of Lot by the angels in verse 10. Do you think this has anything to do with Genesis 18:32?

[B] What, according to verse 12, caused the Holy One to send these angels to destroy Sodom?

[C] Was Lot saved from the destruction around them on account of his being righteous? [Hint: Don't answer until you read today's B'rit Chadasha!]

[D] Why do you think Lot's daughters were spared?

[E] Why do you think Lot's wife became a pillar of salt? Why do you think she looked back?

[F] Why did Lot not want to go to the mountains as the angels instructed him? [Hint: Look back at Genesis 13:10].

[G] Where did Lot want to go instead of the mountains?

[H] What time of day were the cities of the plain destroyed?

[I] According to verse 24, how were Sodom and Amorah destroyed? How do you think seeing that felt *to Lot*? How do you think seeing the destruction happening felt to *Lot's wife*? How about Lot's daughters?

[J] Where did Avraham go to view the aftermath of the destruction?

[K] Describe what Avraham saw when he looked toward Sodom and Amorah. How do you think seeing this affected Avraham?

[L] What is the area around Sodom and Amorah now called? What is the terrain there like?

3. In today's Haftarah reading a wealthy woman provides a room of her home for Elisha to stay in.

[A] What do you think was the woman's reason/motivation for assisting Elisha in this way?

[B] What did the woman's reply [verse 13] to Elisha's question mean?

4. In today's B'rit Chadasha reading from II Kefa [Peter], we read Kefa's perspective on Lot and on the reason why the Holy One poured out judgment on Sodom and G'morrah.

[A] What does Kefa [Peter] say the destruction of Sodom and Amorah are an 'example' of? Explain what you think this means.

[B] How does Kefa say that the sin of the society of Sodom and Amorah affected Lot?

[C] What sins of the society in which you live bother you?

[D] What sins of the society in which you live are you willing to overlook and compromise with in order to continue to enjoy the economic and social benefits of living in that society?

May you never forfeit the Holy One's His Grace or lightly esteem His salvation.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 140:4-5

*Keep me, O Holy One, from the hands of the wicked;
Preserve me from violent men whose purpose it is to make my steps stumble.*

*The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords;
They have spread a net by the wayside; they have set traps for me. **Selah!***