

Vayera - Rabbi Lerner - October 13, 2013

Lot in the City of Sedom

Following Avraham's unsuccessful attempt to save the cities of Sedom and Amorah, two angels arrive in Sedom.

19:1: *The two angels came to Sedom in the evening and Lot was sitting at the gate of Sedom; Lot saw and stood up to meet them and he bowed, face to the ground.* Why two angels? **Rashi** tells us that each angel has only one job. One of these angels that arrived in Sedom had previously healed Avraham and his job now was to save Lot; the other angel was to destroy Sedom. The third angel who had come to announce to Sarah the birth of Yitzchak had completed his job and had left. **Rav Alpert**: it is not to the detriment of an angel by assigning them only one job each; rather it is to their credit – while we might think that is it better to be able to multitask and do many jobs, in fact, Hashem wants our undivided attention and focus on any job, on any religious activity that we do – angels are pure and completely focused on one job at time – this is actually an ideal. **Abarbanel**: the two angels were coming for two purposes: one was to test the people of Sedom, to see if they might be worthy of being saved - he was going to test and see how bad they were; the final Gemar Din hadn't happened yet; maybe they could improve and be saved; the second angel was to save Lot.

They came to Sedom at night. **Sforno**: they came straight from Avraham's tent. But why did it take so long to get there; if they left Avraham's tent in the middle of the day, and they fly quickly from place to place, why did they first arrive there at night? They left when their missions were completed, but Avraham began to pray and negotiate with God to save the cities – it was a long debate lasting hours, and it took a while before the Gemar Din was completed. There was no Nigmar Hadin until evening; even then it wasn't completed, the Din was not completely sealed, as per Avraham's negotiations with God; the angel was going to test them. **Ohr Hachayim**: They came at night to help Lot, to see if he and his family deserved to be saved; Hashem was looking for a zechus for him – in a city that is totally corrupt, Lot was being tested to see whether he would abide by the corrupt laws of the city or whether he would invite the strangers in and feed them as a moral person would – it was to bring zechus to Lot. While we say that he was saved only in the zechus of Avraham, if he was completely guilty, even Avraham's zechus would not have been enough to save him. There had to be some good quality to Lot. The test had to be at night to give him the opportunity to save them - during the day he would never have been able to invite them into to his home. **Rashi** had said that Lot sat at the gates of Sedom because he was a judge there – sitting at gates is a reference to judges. The **Ohr Hachayim** says that it appears that Lot had been appointed that day as a judge for their city, to follow and uphold their laws – it was an even greater test for Lot, because he had just become a "made man" with this appointment, and in his very first day he was being tested to see whether or not he would do the right thing, putting his family in danger and undermining his new appointment.

19:2: *And he said, "Behold now, my masters; turn about, please, to your servant's house; spend the night and wash your feet, then wake up early and go your way!" And they said, "No, rather we will spend the night in the square."* They were testing to see how much he really wanted to do this mitzvah. It happened on the 15th of Nissan, that is why he served Matzah. **Rashi**: He said "You are like masters to me because you passed before my house; I am your servant because I have the obligation of hospitality and I need you to fulfill this mitzvah." Another interpretation is that he was telling them "You need to know where you are, you are in dangerous territory and

you don't want to be seen by the people; I am doing this because you are in grave danger; you don't want to be seen; when you come to my house go in a circuitous path so that you will lose any followers and not be seen;" that is what Suro Nah means – leave and go in a round about way; it is very dangerous for him as well but he feels this moral compulsion to do this mitzvah.

Ramban: he told them to rise early the following morning and beat it out of there before anyone else wakes up and sees them; they would have to leave at the earliest light; Lot knew the depths of their evil, and he worried that trouble would come at the light of dawn if they don't leave early; they had to avoid all detection and get out quickly.

19:3 *And he urged them very much, so they turned toward him and came to his house; he made a feast (Mishteh) for them and baked Matzos, and they ate.* They tried to decline the invitation but he pressed them hard and they complied and came to his house. He made a party and baked matzah for them and they ate. **Sforno:** what does it mean a mishteh? Not just nice food, but there was also wine and booze, to celebrate; why was he giving them wine? Because it was beloved to him, just as the end of the story proves – after the destruction of the cities he gets drunk over the wine his daughters gave him and he had incestuous relations; Avraham never did that – he gave visitors food to eat, but no wine; Avraham made a mishteh on only one occasion, when Yitzchak was weaned; and that was for the great people of his generation; but Lot took every opportunity to drink wine.

19:4: *Before they had a chance to lie down, the people of the city, the people of Sedom, converged upon the house, from young to old, all the people from every quarter.* Why say both from the city, from Sedom - we know what city it is; why the double language? They circled the house from the oldest to the youngest. **Rashi:** from one end of the city to the other they came and gathered; not one person protested; there was not one single tzadik there; there was not a single decent person there. Every last person gathered against them. **Rav Alpert:** it doesn't mean that every last person in all of the cities gathered against them; but if one is part of a group who is about to do something wrong and he does not protest, their status is his status; this is the proof from the Torah that anyone who has the ability to protest and doesn't, he is as guilty as the ones who perpetrate the action; he has an obligation to get up and protest. This was an evil city from end to end. **Rabbeinu Bachya:** why the people of the city, the people of Sedom - why the double language? These people were residents of Sedom and of the City of the Tower ("Ir Umigdal" was what they built in parshas Noach) – they were the ones who were driven out of Migdal Bavel – they were the evil people who participated in building of the tower to fight against God, and they were scattered throughout the world; the most evil of them are the ones who ended up here in Sedom, along with their descendants – they hadn't changed, they continued their evil ways; they were the people of the city of Ninveh – they were the ones who wanted to build a tower to reach the heavens and attack God; they couldn't stand any form of kindness. Sedom became the place of refuge for the worst of the leaders from the previous evil generation, from the story of the Migdal Bavel; they continued their evil, and their descendants were living here, continuing the evil as well.

19:5: *And they called out to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so we may know them."* On a simple level, knowing them could mean something benign, to greet them. **Rashi:** it is the term for carnal knowledge, to have sexual relations with them; they wanted to sodomize them (a derivative of the word Sedom).

19:8: *See now, I have two daughters who have never known a man. I shall bring them out to you and do to them as you please; but to these men do nothing inasmuch as they have come under the*

shelter of my roof. How could Lot have suggested such a horrible thing? **Ramban:** from the praise of this person, who is trying to save these people, we see his incredible shame; he is trying to save them since they are under his roof, but to do this by appeasing the people by making his daughters prostitutes is evil; how could he have suggested such a thing – what was he thinking? He was thinking that this was the lesser of two evils; that he wasn't doing anything too bad to his daughters; to the people of Sedom homosexuality was normal, but Lot thought it was a horrific act; he thought it was much less of a horrible thing for his daughters to be raped, that it was less horrible than homosexuality; it was a crazy suggestion.

Ramban: why were the people of Sedom so into this, that this is how they wanted to welcome every guest? The people of Sedom wanted to prevent any strangers from entering their town because they lived in the best part of the land, the wealthiest area, and others, including the poor, would want to come there and settle; they were repulsed by the concept of tzedakah. But Lot who came with his tremendous wealth had asked for permission to settle – because of his great wealth or because he was the nephew of Avraham, they allowed him to live there. This is what made them the worst of the sinners - their intent was more greed than sexual perversity. As the pasuk in Yechezkel says (16:49): *Behold, this was the sin of Sedom, your sister; She and her villages had pride, surfeit of bread and peaceful serenity, but the hand of the poor and needy she did not strengthen.* They were in the majestic part of the country; they had prosperity but they wouldn't even hand out a small piece of bread to a pauper. They were evil in the eyes of Hashem – they used their very wealth as the source of their evil. The punishment carried out against them was therefore the worst meted out in history – the punishment not only killed them, but it destroyed the land forever, made completely uninhabitable – God left His mark there for all history because they had created a society that was the complete antithesis of what God wants; God exploded His anger against them. God is an Ohev Chesed and these people did the very worst to counter His principles of chesed.