

Parshat Vayera 5778

How are we to make sense of לוט's rescue from סדום? Following the destruction, the verse (19:29) summarises: 'G-d remembered אברהם and rescued לוט from the upheaval', seemingly establishing that לוט was saved in the merit of אברהם.¹

On the other hand, a straight forward reading of the story suggests that לוט's rescue was not part of the initial plan. Only after לוט invites the 2 angels into his home and risks his life to protect them from the mob, do the angels commence the rescue operation. There is plenty of internal evidence for this proposition; however, I want to consider some fascinating parallels with the story of the spies in ספר יהושע in support of this view. As shown in the table below, the parallels are extensive and cover both the similarity in content and specific language²:

סדום and לוט	רהב and the spies
<i>Main themes</i>	
2 angels/מלאכים arrive in סדום on the eve of its destruction	2 spies (also referred to as מלאכים) arrive in יריחו in connection with its imminent destruction
The two angels enter the house of לוט, a local resident - ויבאו אל ביתו	The two spies enter the house of רהב, a local resident - ויבאו בית אשה זונה
The residents find out and demand that לוט handover his guests	The king's messengers find out and demand that רהב turn over her guests
The host (לוט) risks his life to protect his guests	רהב similarly endangers herself to cover up for her guests
לוט and his family are saved (except those that refused to leave or looked back)	As a consequence of her actions, רהב and her family are saved
<i>Similarity of language</i>	
אִיהֶם הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר בָּאוּ אֵלַי הַלַּיְלָה	הִנֵּה אֲנָשִׁים בָּאוּ הֵנָּה הַלַּיְלָה
הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלַינִי וְנִדְעָה אֲתָם	הוֹצִיאֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים הַבָּאִים אֵלַיךְ

¹ See רדק

² See J Grossman, גלוי ומוצפן: על כמה מדרכי העיצוב של הסיפור המקראי, p361

וְהִדַּלְתָּ סֹגֵר אַחֲרָיו	וְהִשְׁעֵר סֹגֵרוֹ
טָרֵם יִשְׁכְּבוּ	וְהִמָּה טָרֵם יִשְׁכְּבוּן
וְהִרְהָרָה הַמֶּלֶט פֶּן יִתְפָּה	וְהִרְהָרָה לָכֵן פֶּן יִפְגְּעוּ

It is clear from the above that לוט sees ספר יהושע as a precedent for רהב's actions. This being the case, we may suggest that, were it not for לוט's loyalty and devotion to his guests, he would not have been saved, in the same way that רהב was only saved as a consequence of her actions.

It appears that לוט was caught in an irreconcilable clash between the diametrically opposed values of אברהם (kindness and charity) and סדום ('what is mine is mine' - see Avos 5:10). Until now he may have been able to live a double life, but now he had to make a fateful choice. As we see from the story and its aftermath, לוט was and remained far from perfect. But at the defining moment when the stakes were highest, לוט sided with the values of אברהם³⁴.

There is a profound lesson here regarding a person's hidden depth of character. History is replete with people who lived largely undistinguished lives, but were able to rise highest when it mattered most. To take a recent example, consider the Las Vegas shooting massacre. There were people who risked their lives, or even died, running into the open plaza to save total strangers whilst the bullets were still flying. When questioned regarding their courage and bravery, simply responded; 'there was no choice'.

In a way, it is true that לוט was saved *because* of אברהם. It was, after all, from אברהם that לוט had learnt and internalised the values which ultimately saved him. However, it was down to לוט to revive those dormant values at the critical moment.

³ This would neatly explain the various connections between לוט and מצרים. In both cases: a) matzos were eaten on the eve of the redemption – see Rashi 18:3; b) the merit for redemption was earned that last night (קרבן פסח/הכנסת אורחים); and c) a distinction was made between those inside of the home (destined to be saved) and those on the outside.

⁴ It is informative that לוט and his family were not allowed to 'look back' as that would be indicative of continued identification with סדום. That would perhaps explain the odd punishment of לוט's wife becoming a 'pillar of salt'. One of the most basic functions of salt is to preserve and a pillar similarly symbolises that which is stationary. Together, this alludes to לוט's wife's inability to remove herself from the culture of סדום in which she had become immersed.