

## Parashat Vayera: Lot and his bad decisions

October 18th, 2013

I was a child when I heard the story of Sodom for the first time and I remember being shocked by the magnitude of the tragedy that hit the city. I already knew the story of the flood and destruction of humanity but at least that ended in a good way: God's promised to never again destroy the world and gave Noah the rainbow as a sign of peace.

Sodom, however, was destroyed because of its evil ways. But today I would like to talk not about the story of the destruction of Sodom, but about its main character: The mysterious survivor Lot, of whom we don't know so much. From last week's Torah portion we know that Lot was Abraham's nephew and also in some way his adoptive son, who left with him from his homeland in a trip towards the Promised Land. Lot, moved by his ambition, decided to establish in the city of Sodom and was saved from the destruction thanks to God who did it after a particular conversation with his servant Abraham. Probably you remember that Abraham discusses with God arguing that he cannot destroy a whole city only because of some of its inhabitants. God, on the other hand, wanted to compromise with Abraham offering him to save the city if he can find 50 righteous men. But Abraham thought that 50 was too much and asked to reduce the number to 45, and then to 40, until they got to the number 10 as the minimum to not destroy the city. Finally even the number 10 was not enough and the city was destroyed. But God made an exception: Lot and his family were saved. And the question here is why? Why just Lot and his family?

Probably, taking on account the negotiation between Abraham and God, we would think that Lot was actually the only one righteous in the city, and even thought God still decided to destroy the place he was convinced by Abraham to save his nephew. But I actually don't agree with that vision, because when we study the life of Lot and especially his relationship with his uncle Abraham, we can discover that the reason for his survival was completely different.

When Abraham departed from Haran to the Land of Israel, the Torah tells us that his nephew Lot went with him. In Hebrew is "Vayelech ito Lot". And later on the text, when Abraham is forced to abandon Canaan and he went to Egypt fleeing from the famine, Lot is still with him, and so he is when Abraham returns from Egypt. But now, when they were returning to Israel, we can see that Lot has suffered a significant transformation, and the Torah describes it through a small but very important detail:

Upon coming back to Israel the Torah says: "And Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him into the South". Lot is still with Abraham, but the Torah uses a different expression to describe their relationship: Now the Torah says that Lot was "imo", not "ito", as in the first time. In Hebrew the meaning of the sentence becomes completely different: In times of famine and difficulties, Lot was with Abraham "because of him" or "depending on him", and now, in abundance, he was "imo": Both of them were at the same level. Lot became so wealthy that he forgot his past and how Abraham helped him. He thought that money and possessions can make him be like Abraham, his uncle that did so much for him in times of trouble.

At the first opportunity Lot decided to move away and not to continue seeing Abraham as his teacher, his mentor. He had no problem to depart from him, being arrogant and ungrateful. What was the

consequence? His ambition moved him to establish in Sodom giving precedence to his economic activities above the moral qualities of the society in which he was to live.

But the question still remains: If he was arrogant, ambitious and ungrateful, why did God saved him and his family? Could it be because we can see at the beginning of the story that he received God's messengers kindly, showing them an apparent hospitability, just he had learned from his uncle Abraham? I don't think so, because even though he invited him to stay at his house, his hospitality was very conditioned: "Stay with me this night, but rise up early in the morning and go on your way".

We are here in front of a very sad story: Lot is saved from destruction but his wife will turn into a statue of salt, and his daughters will commit incest with him as a desperate measure believing they were the last creatures on earth. And after that, nothing else will be known about Lot.

So why he was saved from the catastrophe? Not for being a righteous person, but because of his kinship with Abraham, in a sort of "special benefit" for being the nephew of God's faithful servant.

Lot offers us a sad example of where bad decisions can take us when we place economic well-being above any other consideration. He could not redeem himself, but as descendants of Abraham we can try to do it for him, getting close to moral values, choosing the right priorities, and looking for a life of meaning and acts of kindness toward other human beings.

Shabbat Shalom!

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