

CLASS 72 - VAYERA

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"And so it was when G-d destroyed the cities of the plain, and G-d remembered Avraham, so He sent Lot from amidst the upheaval..." (Breishis 19:29)

G-d remembers the righteousness of Avraham, and Lot is saved from destruction, redeemed from Sedom just in time.

This is quite puzzling.

Lot is not renowned for his religious devotion, and he deliberately parted ways with his illustrious uncle, choosing to live with the wicked men of Sedom rather than with Avraham and his G-d. Even more, while Avraham is the source of all blessing in the world, Lot's very name connotes a curse, and his subsequent antics are certainly far from model behavior.

Hashem does not play favorites, and while we may be remembered as the sons of our forefathers, all other relatives have no special merit. If so, what is the unique connection between Lot and Avraham that warrants Divine intervention? Why does the memory of Avraham bring salvation to Lot?

In our shiur this week, we will answer this question, and explain why the curse of evil can also be the source of much blessing.

1

" 'Matzasi Dovid Avdi' (Tehillim 89:21) Where did I find him? In Sedom." (Breishis Rabbah 41:5)

Lot is saved from Sedom, and in their confused state, his daughters manage to produce children that will carry their father's name. Ammon and Moav are destined to cause Klal Yisrael years of grief and agony, but from their progeny, two very special women will be the matrons of royalty; Rus the Moabite and Na'amah HaAmmonis are mothers to the kingdom of Dovid HaMelech, forebears of the Messiah.

Apparently, there is a positive aspect to the story of Lot and his daughters, one that contains hints of the ultimate redemption.

"The wicked have drawn their sword and bent their bow, to knock down the poor and needy and to slay those of upright ways (Tehillim 37:13)"

"The wicked have drawn their sword this is Amrafel and his cronies"

"..to knock down the poor and needy this is Lot"

"..and to slay those of upright ways this is Avraham" (Breishis Rabbah 42:1)

This Midrash analyzes the battle of Amrafel, the war of four kings against five, among them the ruler of Sedom. Though the Torah narrative implies that Avraham and Lot are merely incidental participants, who were drawn into a battle that was not their own, Chazal teach that Lot and Avraham were actually the true objective of the four evil kings.

Let us explain why.

This battle of the kings is the first war described by the Torah, and like every first, it contains seeds for all the future.

Modern day warfare is a strange and puzzling phenomenon. Why would a healthy and stable human being put his life at risk just to massage the ego of some maniacal strongman? History shows that millions of apparently sane men readily fight for the glory and honor of their country, even in support of a man who they have never elected.

The reason is this: mortal man senses the fragility of his own existence. At times, he may perceive that an individual human being is a worthless entity, and he searches for ways to inject his own life with meaning and purpose. Attachment to one's country is one attempt to connect to a higher value; to become an integral part of a greater whole, and it is the existence of the nation that provides a substantive basis for the private existence of its citizenry. Man has the sense that his nation is immutable, and the willingness to sacrifice his life on behalf of the king expresses this notion his very self has value only to the extent that it relates to an ideal larger than life.

Kingdoms are defined by a totality of power, with the right and might to control without resistance every aspect of life. A battle begins when the king senses a threat to his hegemony, and he engages the enemy in order to preserve his own rule.

The Torah describes how four kings, led by Nimrod and Kedarlaomer, respond to a local rebellion. In the midst of battle, Lot is taken into captivity, and without advance notice, Avraham enters the scene and defeats the world's greatest powers.

"And the king of Sedom went out to greet him [Avraham] after his return from defeating Kedarlaomer.... to the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's valley." (Breishis 14:18)

"...the king's valley where all the nations, of one mind, appointed Avraham as king." (Rashi, ad. loc.)

Avraham Avinu is the first monarch of Klal Yisrael, and like every one of the Malchei Yisrael, his kingdom is an earthly manifestation of G-d's sovereignty. As with the monarchies of mortal men, a kingdom without total hegemony is incomplete, and for this reason, with their defeat, the four kings

surrender to the one true King, and immediately they crown His servant - Avraham Avinu - as their rightful ruler.

The deeds of the forefathers serve as symbols for the future. Avraham's battle is a struggle against much more than four individual kings, for each of these empires represent much more. In fact, echoes of this battle reverberate throughout Jewish history, up to the present day.

"VaYehi Beyimei Amrafel....this is Bavel...V'Aryoch....this is Yavan...Kedarlaomer....this is Maddai....and Tid'al Melech Goyim....this is Edom..." (Breishis Rabbah 42:7)

At varied times, each of these four kingdoms have controlled the world's culture, and their venerable power and dominion remained unchallenged for many generations. Hence, each of these kingdoms stand in direct opposition to Malchus Shamayim, since redemption cannot be achieved unless the unity of G-d is apparent to all the world, without exception.

Though each individual nation may be unaware of the spiritual undercurrents that inform their actions, Chazal have taught that though they may not see, their star in heaven does, and at a deeper level the life of every nation is a natural outgrowth of their own particular spiritual traits.

Each king hopes to maintain and enhance his own authority, not realizing that his own rule stands at odds with the kingdom of Heaven. But, as the Divine plan unfolds, the reigning monarch, uncertain of his ability to live forever, senses the ground shifting underneath his feet. Unable to pinpoint the coming cataclysm, he lashes out instead at the nearest and most available target, the country that borders his own.

"If you see nations provoking one another, anticipate the coming of the Messiah" (Breishis Rabbah 42:7)

Is there a reason that nations suddenly are ready to battle one another?

They sense the instability of their own regime, aware in their heart of hearts that a mortal's reign is temporal at best. Though they cannot know the folly of their ways, in truth, they are mere pawns in the unfolding of the Divine plan, the revelation of the true and lasting Kingdom.

Mashiach is on the way.

2

"Matzasi Dovid Avdi' (Tehillim 89:21) Where did I find him? In Sedom." (Breishis Rabbah 41:5)

Can it be that Malchus Bais Dovid and the redemption of Klal Yisrael find their origin in Sedom?

A 'Metziah' is an object that has been lost from its proper place and found where it is least expected. This is the path to salvation as well, a process that to all appearances was headed in the opposite direction.

Lot is the progenitor of the Messiah, and it is against this threat that the four kings are forced to action. Though the protagonists are unaware, as we explained, the mobilization for war, so unreasonable on the face of things, unexpectedly reveals the heavenly Kingdom they hope to suppress. It is the throne that is at stake, and ultimately, only one throne will prevail.

True, Kedarlaomer and company venture out only in order to stymie a minor rebellion. But, unbeknownst to them, it is Avraham and Lot who pose the real danger to the kingdom, for only Hashem arranges each and every war, as He sets the stage for a royal coronation.

The Talmud describes a dialogue between G-d and the nations at the time of Israel's final redemption. In response to the claim that all their worldly actions were intended to aid the Divine plan, Hashem says:

"...all that you have done is only for your own purposes; you repaired bridges only to collect taxes, and you built cities only to support your armies, and wars? I make wars!, as it says 'Hashem Ish Milchama' (Avoda Zara 2b)

War has no rational explanation. It follows then, that the existence of war as a modern weapon of civilized society is a Divinely ordained means of actualizing G-d's kingdom. Hence, the directive of our Sages: when war is in the air, seek out the Messiah's footsteps, for when man's hands are powerless; when their efforts are clearly tools for a higher purpose, the plan of Hashem is quite easily discerned.

3

"What was the remembrance of Avraham that regarded Lot? Hashem remembered that Lot had known that Sara was the wife of Avraham, and heard Avraham say in Egypt that she was his sister, yet didn't reveal the matter, because Avraham was special to him, therefore he was special to Hashem." (Rashi, Breishis 19:29)

Rashi attests to the merit by which Lot is saved from Sedom, the fact that Lot kept secret the true relationship between Avraham and Sara, after Sara had been taken to the house of Phaaraoh.

"Although on the surface Lot separated from Avraham, from an inner perspective, there is a great idea that connects him to Avraham, for he did not reveal the secret of Avraham. And this idea is what our Sages meant by saying: Hashem wanted to produce two outstanding finds [Rus and Naamah], from which would emerge the kingdom of Dovid." (Maharal, Gur Aryeh, ad. loc.)

The Midrash (Breishis Rabbah 41:6) points out that Lot and Avraham both look exactly alike, but this is not merely a matter of coincidence or a superficial similarity. The Maharal teaches that it is the inner secrets of life that binds them forever, and not their outward appearance. Avraham may be the first king of Israel, but Lot is the last. And despite appearances, he harbors the secret of the Divine plan, the ultimate and final redemption that the Messiah will bring.

It appears that the nations are ready to go to war for reasons of their own, but the Torah reveals that war and kingdoms are not a human invention. The battle of the four kings is a battle against G-d and His Kingdom, and an attempt to hold back the coming revelation. It is a battle against Lot or more accurately, his descendant Mashiach Ben Dovid. Every battle has one end preservation of the monarchy, but in actuality there can be only one King:

"And on that day G-d will be King of all the earth, and on that day, Hashem will be One and His Name will be One."

Have a good Shabbos!

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