

# YOU'RE ONLY FOOLING YOURSELF

*by Rabbi Yaakov Menken*

In last week's reading, we learned that the shepherds of Avraham and Lot were arguing - and that eventually Avraham suggested to Lot that they part ways, and permitted Lot to choose the direction. The Torah tells us that Lot looked around, and realized that the Jordan Valley was extraordinarily fertile. Therefore he went there, while Avraham settled in Kenaan.

The Midrash tells us that the Torah is only offering us Lot's "surface" reasoning. Why did Lot actually choose to go to that valley? In order that he should set up tents reaching as far as S'dom - where "the people of S'dom were truly wicked and sinful to G-d." [13:13] This was true even though Lot would not participate in their behavior - he was still drawn to it. Although he justified his behavior (even to himself) by looking at the fertile Jordan Valley, the real attraction was the immorality that permeated S'dom and the nearby cities.

This week, we see the truth come to light. After the destruction of S'dom, Lot's daughters conclude that all mankind has again been destroyed (similar to the flood of Noach), and that it is incumbent upon them to continue the species with the only remaining man. Knowing that Lot would never permit such an act, they give him wine - and two nations emerge, letting Lot's inner nature be known for all time.

[If he was drunk, how do we know that this was indeed his nature? Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (Rashi, 19:33) explains that Lot realized on the following morning what his eldest daughter had done, but nonetheless permitted himself to become drunk that evening as well.]

There is a relevant story about the Alter of Slabodka (Alter - old man, sage), who once needed to travel to Koenigsburg for an eye operation. When he returned, someone asked him where he had been, and why he went. His reply? He went to Koenigsburg, to see a push-button umbrella. An umbrella? Didn't he go for an operation?

Well, yes - but the Alter was searching his subconscious. The doctor had told him of two hospitals capable of performing the necessary operation, they had gone through all the plusses and minuses of each location - and eventually they came to a rational decision.

Even so, the Alter had once before travelled through Koenigsburg. Looking out from his train, he had seen a man operate a push-button umbrella - and in that era, this apparently represented a technological innovation as exciting as Windows ME. So the Alter wondered - how much did that umbrella bias my thinking? Is it possible that I chose a hospital based on the chance to have such an

umbrella?

All too often, we do just this - and refuse to admit it. Worse, we make our decisions without any careful thought, without a rational basis, and we still refuse to admit our biases. Is this rational?

Perhaps we are fooling no one but ourselves - and who would want to be so easily fooled?

[Heard from: Rabbi Asher Z. Rubenstein, Jerusalem]

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken