

Measure for Measure

When traveling south in the Land of Israel toward the Dead Sea, many of us may look for a pillar of salt wondering if it is perhaps the wife of Lot. Chazal wonder why she received such a severe punishment. After all, isn't it human nature to look behind to see what is going on? Further, why did she specifically become a pillar of salt?

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz in *Sichot Mussar* explains based on the *Ramban* that Hashem Himself descended to punish the people of Sodom. A moment of powerful Divine punishment is also a time of tremendous closeness and revelation. A familiar example can be found at the time of the *churban haBayit*. At the very moment of imminent

destruction, the *keruvim* were embracing one another reflecting the great closeness and love felt by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for His people. Similarly, the punishment of Lot's wife was the effect of seeing a revelation of G-dliness that warranted her death.

Rav Shalom Schwadron in *Lev Shalom* explains that Lot's wife looked back at the demolition of the city because she did not fully believe it would happen. Usually fear of death hinders curiosity, preventing people from doing what they shouldn't. But in this case, Lot's wife was not certain that the men who visited her home were really angels; she did not actually believe their threats. Perhaps, she thought, she was being sent from her home for no reason. Therefore, her punishment was not merely for turning around to look behind her, it was more for the lack of belief that she exhibited.

Shai LaTorah speculates whether Lot and his family were included with those who were destined for destruction yet merited a special salvation or maybe they were not even incorporated in the decree. He argues that since Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt it indicated that they were included in the original judgement but had the fortune to be saved only under specific conditions. When Lot's wife abrogated the conditions by looking back, she was subject to punishment like the rest of the city.

May the Torah learned from this issue of
Torah Tidbits be in loving memory and

לעילוי נשמת

הרב אשר מיכאל בן הר' צבי ז"ל

Rabbi Oscar Michael Lifshutz z"l

on his 30th Yahrzeit

כ"ג מרחשוון תשנ"א

Martin Lifshutz and Family

Rashi (*B'reishit 19:26*), quotes the midrash that the punishment of salt was measure for measure. When Lot welcomed the angels as his guests, his wife went to her neighbor to borrow salt. Spreading the word about her husband's hospitality eventually led to the city's destruction. Others explain that she did not mind having the guests as much as she minded giving them salt to enhance their food. Rav Epstein in *Sefer Hearot* expounds that when one hesitates to be hospitable it does not necessarily reflect poorly on the person, since perhaps he struggles with spending money. However, when one does a *chesed* and specifically begrudges another any enjoyment, it is a reflection of wickedness. As such, Lot's wife was punished for her wickedness. It was as if she said, "I'll share my food but I won't put forth extra effort for you to enjoy it."

When Lot fled he literally turned his back on his chosen lifestyle and was able to realize the mistakes he had made. Rav Milevsky in *Ner Uziel* suggests that Lot's ability to do *teshuvah* stemmed from his affinity towards *chesed* that kept him connected to Hashem. Lot's wife, however, refused to be involved in his *chesed*. Salt demonstrates going above and beyond, providing people with more than they need which is a manifestation of *chesed*, not just *emet*. She did not have this core from which to do *teshuvah* and was still very much connected to Sodom with all the wickedness it represented. Her punishment in the form of salt teaches us the importance of *chesed* as a medium of connection and a channel for self-improvement. ■

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