



Reward's Reasoning

“Vayehi beshachet Elokim et arei hakikar vayizkor Elokim et Avraham vayishlach et Lot mitoch hahafechah – And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and He sent Lot out of the midst of the destruction...” (*Bereisheet* 19:29)

Rashi is troubled by the mention of Avraham; what does the remembrance of Avraham have to do with saving Lot? He therefore quotes *Bereisheet Rabbah*, “He (Hashem) remembered that Lot knew that Sarah was Avraham’s wife, and that he had heard in Egypt that Avraham said about Sarah, “She is my sister,” yet he did not reveal the matter because he [Lot] had pity on him [Abraham]. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, had pity on him [Lot].” (*Rashi*) This good deed was the merit by which Lot was saved from the destruction of Sdom. Yet Rashi is difficult to understand. Why is this cited as the outstanding good deed that saved Lot? It seems that Lot’s hospitality towards the angels that came to visit him was far greater, he

received them with gracious attention at the risk of his own life!

One approach is offered by the *Beis Halevi* *zt”l*. There was a fundamental difference between the hospitality of Avraham Avinu and that of Lot. The angels who appeared to Avraham Avinu looked and acted as idol worshipping wayfarers.

Nevertheless, Avraham Avinu treated them with tremendous respect and honor. However, the Torah tells us that Lot saw his guests as actual angels, and it is obvious that one would treat angels with respect and honor, regardless of the circumstance. Therefore, this mitzvah is not credited to Lot as enough of a merit to save



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him from the eradication of Sdom.

In his famous *Kuntrus Habechirah*, Rav Dessler *zt”l* offers a keen insight in understanding the mechanism of free choice. A person’s *nekudat habechirah*, the threshold of tension where his choices happen, is based on his own personal circumstances and his personal development. This can be likened to the battlefield between two warring countries. Each nation has territory behind it; this is land that has already been conquered. Similarly, we all have areas that no longer pose a challenge for us, we make choices and act organically, without



Mazal Tov to



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deliberation or struggle. However, there is more territory that has not yet been conquered, i.e., areas that feel beyond our natural capacity.

Here lies the point of challenge, the battleground between our inner, conflicting forces, between what we know to be true and what our baser selves crave. It is exactly in these areas of triumph that one gets the greatest rewards, since this is the arena where his *bechirah*, his power of choice is stretched to the fullest extent. For many people, it can be said that much of their mitzvah observance is really not to their personal credit, rather, the credit belongs to their education and their upbringing. Although there is reward for mitzvot that don't require struggle and effort, it cannot be compared to those mitzvot borne of inner conflict and true choice. Hence, quoting from the Saba of Slobodka zt"l, Rav Dessler teaches that for Lot, taking in guests did not require any sort of inner struggle. He was raised in Avraham Avinu's home where the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* became his second nature. However, Lot did have an area of weakness; the desire for money and material wealth. When he accompanied Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu to Egypt, he experienced a true struggle. Should he expose the truth of Avraham and Sarah's relationship and perhaps receive a sizable financial gain or should he remain true to his mentor and caregiver? Lot's struggle here to choose kindness and protect Avraham thus acted as a true merit to save him from Sodom's destruction.

We too can embrace our challenges and inner struggles with fortitude and resolve, knowing that it is here that we will find real growth and reward. ■

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