

A Taste of Torah

A Lot to Think About

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

One of the most enigmatic personalities in the Torah is Lot, Avraham's nephew. Praised at times by our Sages, reviled at other times, we are hard-put to determine whether this individual was righteous, wicked, or all of the above. Although this article will not nearly do justice to understanding Lot, we will try to define at least one aspect of his character.

Avram is commanded by H-shem to leave his home and birthplace and travel to an unspecified location. Avram unquestioningly picks himself up and promptly hits the road. This journey is regarded as one of the ten tests that H-shem subjected Avraham to; leaving one's homeland, and without knowing where one is going, to boot, is no small feat. But, nonetheless, Avram had G-d's guarantee that he would become wealthy, famous, and father a great nation in his new location. Not so Lot. Lot received no promises as to his status in a strange, unknown land. Yet Lot travelled with Avraham, not wanting to part with this man of G-d who was his spiritual mentor. A tremendous sacrifice on Lot's part, one that seems to indicate an exalted spiritual state.

Later, though, when Avram and Lot grow wealthy, a disagreement arises between the shepherds of Lot and Avram. Avram says the time has come for them to part ways. Lot chooses to settle in the area of Sodom, due to the very fertile land and abundant grazing available there. Lot is taken to task by our Sages for settling in Sodom, whose residents were far from ideal neighbors. What brought about Lot's fateful

decision to settle in such an area? How could he abandon everything that his uncle stood for and live amongst some of the most wicked people to ever walk the face of the Earth?

Let us examine another incident that will shed light on Lot. When Avram and Lot arrived in Canaan, the land was beset by a terrible famine, which forced them to descend to Egypt. Avram, fearful that the Egyptians would murder him so as to be able to abduct his beautiful wife Sara, claimed that she was his sister. Lot, who was aware of the scheme, didn't reveal the true status of Sara. Lot is praised by our Sages for his silence, so much so that they say this was the merit which allowed him to escape the destruction of Sodom. A very odd merit, indeed. Why was it so difficult for him to keep his mouth shut? What would Lot stand to gain by revealing that Sara was in fact Avram's wife, thereby bringing about his uncle's death?

Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel (1849-1927; known as the Alter of Slabodka), explains that there is but one thing Lot stood to gain. Lot was, at that point, Avram's sole heir, as Avram had no children. Should Avram die childless, Lot would inherit his estate. And here we come to Lot's greatest challenge: money. Lot, as great as he was, was greedy. And the opportunity to become Avram's heir was a great temptation. Resisting the temptation to spill the beans was a tremendous spiritual victory for Lot, one which accrued great merit. Later, the opportunity to settle in one of the wealthiest places in the world, the area of Sodom, proved too great a temptation, and he succumbed. This time, Lot failed to overcome his greatest character flaw,

Stories For The Soul

Priceless 'Souls'

A well-known speaker once began a seminar by holding up a \$20 bill.

"Who would like this twenty-dollar bill?" he asked the 300 people in the room. Hands started going up.

"I am going to give this twenty dollars to one of you, but first let me do this," he continued, proceeding to crumple the dollar bill.

He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air.

"Well," he replied, "what if I do this?" And he dropped it and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. "Now, who still wants it?" he asked. Again the hands went into the air.

"My friends, you have learned a valuable lesson," he concluded. "No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value. You are priceless. The worth of our lives comes not in what we do or who we know, but from who we are."

The verse tells us, "Abram took... the souls they made in Charan" (Gen.12:5). Abram took the people whom he had influenced when he went on his journey. It is noteworthy that the people are referred to as souls. We see what the Torah views as important: not a person's body, wealth or power, but his soul.

Adapted with permission from Shul-Week by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

REVISITING WOMEN OF THE BIBLE WITH MRS. ESTI SCHWAB

Join Mrs. Esti Schwab for "Revisiting Women of the Bible." This four-part series will help you gain a better understanding and a new appreciation of the great women of the Book of Genesis: Chava (Eve), Sara (Sarah), Rivka (Rebecca), Rochel (Rachel), & Leah. Classes will be held on Sundays from 11:30 am-12:30pm at Barnes & Noble (960 S. Colorado Blvd.)



LIBERATED PARENTS, LIBERATED CHILDREN WITH MRS. AVIGAIL STEINHARTER

Join Mrs. Avigail Steinharter for "Liberated Parents, Liberated Children: Your Guide to a Happier Family." This six part series for moms integrates the timeless wisdom of the Torah with the approach of the world-renowned Dr. Haim Ginott. Classes will be held on Tues., Nov. 1, Nov. 8, Nov. 15, Nov. 22, Nov. 29, & Dec. 6 from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.. Cost: \$80 for all six classes. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org



THE LATE SHOW: THURS. NIGHT SEDER AT AISH

Join the Chevra for learning and cholent at Aish. Maariv is at 9:00 p.m. followed by learning and refreshments. For chavrusas or other information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855

Interpersonal Issues Bal Tolin

A salaried employee who is hired for the long-term with an agreement for payment on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis is subject to bal tolin, even if the worker is hired on a yearly

contract.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

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and his environment ultimately affected him negatively.

Every one of us has unique attributes, unique challenges, unique traits. It is difficult to know when we achieve our greatest accomplishments

in life; a seemingly trivial incident can be a tremendous test. It is incumbent upon us to always be on guard, because all too often we realize we've missed an opportunity for spiritual growth after we've failed to give it sufficient attention.

Ask the Rabbi Graduated Observance

Gabor Borbely from Las Vegas, Nevada wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can you please tell me shortly about the minhag (custom) of covering our heads?

Tamar Tessler from Johannesburg, South Africa wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Where are there halachos (laws) about yarmulkes? How do we know which size is kosher? Material? Are there any halachos regarding the positioning of the yarmulke on the head? I know this could be a touchy question (political correctness!). Thank you for answering.

Dear Gabor Borbely and Tamar Tessler,

The Talmud says "cover [the child's] head so that he will have the fear of heaven." The Talmud also associates a

covered head with humility.

In "Guide for the Perplexed," Maimonides states that the early Sages were repelled by a bare head. The custom to wear a head covering is legislated in Shulchan Aruch.

The color and material depend on custom. Some prefer multi-colored versions, some prefer black. The Chasam Sofer in his responsa says yarmulkes may be crocheted or woven even if hair sticks through. Regarding size, there are differing views. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, shlita, requires that the kippa be big enough to be seen from all sides, but other authorities, including Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, disagree and say that there is no size specification. I am not familiar with any source regarding where exactly to position the yarmulke.

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