



# TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Vayera

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## A Taste of Torah Pouring Salt on the Wound

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

As Lot, his wife and two daughters are led from Sodom to safety by two angels, they are given a warning: Don't look back. Rashi explains that although Lot and his family were saved, they were not deserving enough to witness Hashem's retribution upon the wicked Sodomites.

Alas, Lot's wife does not heed the instructions and she sneaks a glance at the destruction. The Torah tells us that as a consequence of her about-face, she was turned into a pillar of salt. Why was she subject to this fate? Rashi once again comes to the rescue and explains that earlier, when Lot had hosted the two angels, disguised as humans, in his home, they sat down for a meal. During the meal, Lot asked his wife for some salt, to which she disgustingly replied, "This terrible custom, as well, you seek to introduce here?!" Because she responded negatively to Lot about giving salt to their guests, she was punished in kind by being turned into a pillar of salt.

Anyone studying this Rashi should be struck by an obvious question: Ostensibly, Lot's wife served these angels-turned-humans an entire meal without recorded complaint. Yet when Lot asked her to bring some salt to the table, she suddenly decides to toe the Sodom party line about having guests? What is it about the salt that wounds her so?

The Pardes Yosef (Rabbi Yosef Poznovsky of Pabianice; 1875-1942) explains that when a person has guests for a meal, he goes the extra mile to make tasty, delicious food in

the hope that the guests will enjoy themselves and will want to return again. However, if one is forced to serve food for other people – for example, if the government forces a person to host soldiers for meals – the person will try to avoid serving tasty food in the hope that the unwanted guests will have no desire to come back again.

Lot's wife wasn't really given a choice about having guests over on that fateful night. Lot walked in and told her to prepare food, and, despite her misgivings, she complied. However, she deliberately undersalted the food so that it should be bland and tasteless. Her hope was that these guests would eat and leave for good, having little interest in returning for future meals.

Lot, however, would have none of it. When he realized that the food needed salt, he asked his wife to provide some. At this point, Lot's wife, having absorbed the severe anti-hospitality culture of Sodom, showed her true colors. She protested that it was one thing to host guests for a one-time meal, but it was another level entirely to feed them in such a manner as to encourage them to come again. Her response, "This terrible custom, as well, you seek to introduce here?!" was not so much a comment about the requested salt, but, rather, a commentary on the extent of Lot's hospitality – he wanted them to please come again!

And so, because she, too, was complicit in the utter rejection of kindness displayed by Sodom, when

### Stories for the Soul

#### Coming Full Circle

A young Israeli man from a secular background became interested in exploring his roots and went to study at a yeshiva. Gradually, he took on proper observance of Torah and mitzvos, to the delight of his teachers at the yeshiva.

This young man's father, however, was furious at his son's interest in religion. He accused the yeshiva staff of brainwashing his son, and eventually dragged them to court, demanding that the court forcibly remove his son from the yeshiva.

As the irate father stood before the judge, explaining the heartbreak he suffered seeing his son leaving his family's way of life behind, the judge interrupted.

"I know who you are! We both lived in the same town in Europe, and you were brought up in a religious family. You left religion, and your mother was heartbroken. Now you are upset as you live through a similar experience that you gave to your mother!

"I remember your mother crying and praying for your return. I always wondered to myself, 'What happened to those prayers? What did they achieve?' But I see that G-d stored them away and now, many years later, they have been fulfilled in her grandson."

In this week's parsha, Avraham prays on behalf of the city of Sodom, seemingly to no avail, as G-d destroys the city. However, Avraham's prayers succeeded in saving his nephew Lot from the destruction of Sodom – from whom eventually emerged Ruth, the matriarch of the Davidic Dynasty and, ultimately, Mashiach himself. We cannot know, in this lifetime, what our prayers truly accomplish.

## Kollel Happenings

### KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org) or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org), email [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

### HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit [denverkollel.org](http://denverkollel.org) or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

## Halacha Riddles

**Last week we asked:** When does one use all ten fingers to make a blessing?

**Answer:** When making a *bracha* on bread, one should grasp the bread with all ten fingers (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 167:4). On Shabbos, both

loaves should be held together in the ten fingers (Mishna Berura *ibid.*:23)

**This week's question:** When may something be thrown in the trash only if it's less than a *kezayis* (olive's volume)?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part II

Little is known of Rav Saadia's early years, but by the age of twenty, he had completed a work on Hebrew work and Hebrew dictionary titled *Agron*. Interestingly, in the introduction to this work, Rav Saadia wrote an acrostic with his name, and refers to himself as Sa'id, which would seem to be his Arabic name, Sa'id ibn Yusuf al-Fayyumi. However, in later writings he refers to himself as Saadia, and this is clearly the name by which he is known.

*Agron* was a very useful book for Jewish writers. The great Torah commentator and poet Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra, who lived in Spain some two centuries later, praised the work highly.

At the age of 23, Rav Saadia wrote a work against the Karaites. Here, a brief discussion regarding the Karaites is in order.

The Karaites are a sect of Jews who believe only in the Written Law, but

reject that an Oral Law was given to Moshe on Mt. Sinai. Rather, they believe that it is the duty of every Jew to interpret the Torah for himself. They are the heirs of the Sadducees of the Second Temple era, who espoused a similar belief system and are often spoken of in the Talmud. While there is some debate regarding the exact beginning of the Karaites, it seems that the movement began around the year 760 CE with a man named Anan (and his followers were, in fact, often referred to as Ananites). Anan was a descendant of the Davidic line, and had hoped to be appointed as Exilarch in Babylonia. The Exilarch was a government-recognized appointee, a scion of the House of David, who was the political leader of the Jews in Babylonia. When he did not receive the hoped-for position, Anan and his supporters created a new community with him as its leader.

## A Taste of Torah

*To be continued*

it came time for her comeuppance, she was transformed into the very salt that revealed the internal rot that had taken hold of her along with the rest of the doomed city.

It is not unusual for a person to be forced or guilt-tripped into performing a favor or kindness that he really has no interest in doing. Once one is engaged in the favor, he is faced with

the choice if doing it with dedication and enthusiasm, or of going through the motions, all the while mentally (or verbally) grumbling about it. The path one decides will determine whether one gets credit for a true act of kindness which, albeit initially imposed upon the person, now becomes a full-fledged mitzvah, or instead misses out on a golden opportunity as he digs himself into a hole of self-pity and selfishness.

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