

Dvar Torah for Parshat VaYera

written by Ozer Bergman

October 22, 2010

Based on *Sichot Haran (Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom) #22*

"When God destroyed the cities of the plain, God remembered Avraham and sent Lot from amidst the upheaval..." (Genesis 19:29).

A Midrash on this verse (*Tanchuma, VaYera #9*) comments, "Even when the Holy, Blessed One is angry, He has compassion." It immediately continues, "[On Shabbat] one may save [from a fire] the Torah case along with Torah, and the tefillin case with the tefillin.* This teaches you: Fortunate are the tzaddikim and fortunate those who cling to them." What does Rebbe Nachman say about clinging to tzaddikim? It says here:

It is very good to be worthy of connecting to a genuine tzaddik. Regarding the Messianic era it is written, "To grasp the ends of the earth and shake the wicked from it" (Job 38:13).** However, one who is connected to a genuine tzaddik can grab hold of him and survive. Because he is connected and affiliated with the tzaddik, he will not be cast off along with the wicked.

What happens to Lot in this week's *parshah* is a pretty good demonstration of this teaching. This in despite of the fact that Lot had traded away his close connection with Avraham Avinu for the greed and immorality of Sodom. The lessons he learned from Avraham Avinu gave Lot a vestigial connection to the tzaddik. Despite the mortal risk involved by committing the "crime of hospitality" in the Bizarro world of Sodom, Lot still actively sought guests (Genesis 19:1; Rashi). And when his guests spoke negatively of his adopted city's despicable behavior, Lot, somewhat akin to Avraham Avinu, attempted to defend the Sodomites (*Bereishis Rabbah* 50:5).

Certainly we who, despite our weaknesses of the flesh and occasional fall into the pit of greed, actively seek a connection with Rebbe Nachman and other genuine tzaddikim (past and present), can hope and pray that that our grasp on them (and of them) will always be firm. Note that the “grasping and shaking” that Lot underwent had a direct bearing on Mashiach. As a result of being saved, Lot and his daughter began the family tree that eventually produced King David, great-grandfather of Mashiach.

What is this “grasping and shaking” business anyway? It’s God’s way of getting our attention. God doesn’t want any of His creations to be guilty and suffer. He wants them to be their best (*Tanchuma, VaYera* #8). So, for 52 years God made earthquakes to wake up the Sodomites (*ibid.* #10)—they were His creations too! He didn’t want them to be wicked and die.

An awful lot of pre-Mashiach shaking has happened in our lifetime. The purpose of disasters is not for survivors and observers to self-righteously say, “Those folks were wicked! They got what was coming to them!” It is for us to shake off our own misbehavior. As the Chofetz Chaim responded to the news of an earthquake, “I don’t know what it means, but I do know God is telling us: Children—return to Me.”

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

© Copyright 2010 Breslov Research Institute

**Shabbat* 116b, *Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim* 334:15

**God will “grasp...and shake the wicked from it, like one shakes a tallit” (Rashi), but the tzaddik remains (*Metzudot*).