

This Week's Parshah - Parshas Lech Lecha

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Esther *bas* Eizik *a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Yetzer Hara: The Dastardly Destroyer

Knowing how the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) operates is not only informative, but a crucial and effective tool in protecting ourselves, as well. The more we are aware of his strategies and methods, the better chance we will have in avoiding his pitfalls.

From Riches to Rags

A favorite ploy of the Yetzer Hara is on display in this week's *parshah*, with Avraham's nephew Lot providing a prime illustration. When the time came to separate from Avraham, Lot's choice of relocation was "interesting," to say the least. "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and he saw the entire plain of the Yarden, that it was fertile ground; (this was) before Hashem destroyed Sodom and Amorah. It was like the Garden of Hashem... And Lot chose (this location) for himself..." (*Bereishis 13:10,11*). This was the area in which the sinful city of Sodom was located. The *passuk* continues, describing Lot's journey to his new home: "And Lot traveled *mikedem*." While the simple meaning of this term is "from the east," Rashi comments homiletically that it reveals Lot's true mindset: he moved away from the *Kadmono shel Olam* (Hashem, the "Ancient" One of the World, Who has always existed). "I am no longer interested – not in Avraham nor his G-d," Lot declared.

From his associations with Avraham, Lot emerged as a very wealthy man. "And also to Lot, who journeyed with Avraham, were sheep, cattle and tents" (*ibid.* v. 5). He then settled in a luxuriant, fertile area and even rose to prominence among his new townsfolk, obtaining a judgeship (*Rashi on 19:1*). Thus, at the same time that he reached the pinnacle of material success, he became distant from his Creator.

Fast forward to the end of the story. In *parshahs* Vayera, the city of sin is obliterated. Lot – in the merit of his righteous uncle – is spared. But his situation at that point contrasts markedly with the picture of grandeur in this week's *parshah*. At the end, he is told, "Flee with your life" (*19:17*) – about the only thing remaining to him. He had to abandon his possessions, his neighborhood went up in smoke, he lost most of his family, and his new home was a cave.

The entire episode is markedly similar to the description in the Mishnah in Avos (*4:9*):

רבי יונתן אומר, כל המקיים את התורה מעני, סופו לקימה מעשר. וכל המבטל את התורה מעשר, סופו לבטלה מעני.

"R' Yonasan says: Whoever fulfills the Torah from a state of poverty – will in the end fulfill it from a state of wealth. And whoever neglects the Torah from wealth – will in the end neglect it from poverty."

The Post-Mortem

What happened here? Lot seems to have started off alright, his association with Avraham benefitting him spiritually and materially. But when he veered off the path, everything spiraled completely downhill.

The Chofetz Chaim (*Nefutzos Yisrael, ch. 3*) dissects for us what was really happening behind the scenes, revealing the Satan hard at work.

He begins his explanation with an illustrative story: A wealthy magnate, in need of assistance in keeping track of his business affairs, sought to hire a qualified bookkeeper. This was perfect for Chaim, skilled in this area, who was desperate for a source of livelihood. Thus he came into the employ of the magnate, who offered him \$100 per month, a princely sum in those days.

But Chaim had an erstwhile enemy, a hateful and devious man. As soon as he got wind of Chaim's newfound arrangement, he sprang into action.

The schemer approached the magnate with a proposition. "I know," he told him, "that you own much real estate and could really be earning a huge sum from tenants. But I also know the problem – you can't find a capable landlord to handle the rent collection. So I have the perfect solution for you, as I know just the man for the job. If you hire Chaim for this endeavor, the profits will start rolling in."

The businessman had to admit that the proposal was sound. So he summoned Chaim and informed him of the new terms of his employment. "It turns out," he explained, "that I don't really need you so much for bookkeeping; I can really handle that angle myself. What I really need you to do for me is ensure that my tenants pay their rents. Unfortunately, that type of work carries a salary of only \$20 a month, but it is still steady pay." Chaim, in his destitute state, was in no position to turn down the offer. So he swallowed the pay cut.

And so things continued for a year or so. But Chaim's enemy was still not placated, knowing that Chaim still had work – at his own behest, no less. So he contrived any number of accusations of Chaim's delinquency, reporting regularly to the magnate. Eventually, his employment was terminated completely, and Chaim was left with nothing.

This, explains the Chofetz Chaim, is the Yetzer Hara's diabolical plan, which played itself out in the case of Lot. The Yetzer Hara sets his eyes on a servant of Hashem, begrudging him the inestimable reward that awaits him in the World to Come. With an aim toward eliminating this eternal bounty, he arranges for an "employment adjustment" of sorts. This often comes in the form of newfound material wealth, as the Yetzer Hara entices his target to devote more and more time and energy to its pursuit – at the expense of his spiritual endeavors.

But even when the Yetzer Hara is successful in his goals, he is not content. He might have wiped out his victim's store of reward in the World to Come – but he has left him with considerable fruits in This World! Thus, he gets back to work, engaged both in enticement to more sin and with subsequent *kitrugim* (accusations) in the Heavenly lair. This continues until, eventually, the hapless victim, ensnared in his trap, ends up without Olam Haba (the World to Come) or Olam Hazei (This World).

"*Sofu l'vatlah mei'oni*" – in the end, he will be neglecting Torah from a state of poverty. May Hashem protect us!