

Lech Lecha Parshah by Nehama (Bunny) Wosk 2020

This week's Torah Portion is Lech Lecha. Avram is told to leave his land, his family and all that he has known to go to an undisclosed place that G-d will show him. This is a spiritual as well as a physical journey for him. He has several challenges that he needs to face before G-d rewards him as the father of a great nation. He has the tools—his deep belief and trust in G-d, his knowledge of monotheism and his ability to teach others about G-d, no matter what their initial ability to understand may be. He brings with him Sarai, his wife, Lot, his nephew, and the many other people whom he has already convinced of G-d, the Creator of all beings. He brings Lot, because Lot has asked to join him. But for Lot, this journey is more a physical journey rather than a spiritual journey as Lot hopes to gain the benefit of being Avram's nephew and his heir. In today's reading, we are taken to the part where Lot and Abraham separate. Through his relationship with Avram, Lot grows wealthy and powerful, but that's what starts the rift between them. According to Midrash, Avram is always careful to muzzle his cattle when passing through the fields of others. Lot's shepherds let his animals graze wherever they please. Their argument is that G-d has promised to give the land of Canaan to Avram, and Avram has no children, so it will all go to Lot. Therefore, they feel they are justified in letting Lot's animals loose in anyone's field. To Avram, this is utterly unacceptable. Although G-d has promised the land to his descendants, he has not yet taken possession, and thus has no rights to his neighbors' fields. In any case, Lot is not the ultimate heir. To make matters worse, Lot resembles Avram physically,¹ so his behavior reflects negatively on Avram as well. Finally, Avram issues an ultimatum: "Please, let us go our separate ways. If you go to the left, I will go to the right. If you go to the right, I will go to the left."² For Lot, this should have been an opportunity for self-reflection—to improve his ways and not lose his relationship with his revered Uncle Avram. Instead, Lot agrees to part and sets up house among the most depraved people then in existence—the residents of Sodom. Not long afterward, four strong kings pick a battle with five weak kings, including the king of Sodom, and subdue the population. After 12 years of subjugation, the five kings rebel. War breaks out, and Lot is taken prisoner. When Avram hears the news, he immediately swings into action and personally goes into battle to rescue Lot. At this point, does Lot gratefully return to Avram's court? He does not. He continues living with the corrupt Sodomites and even becomes a leader among them. Eventually, matters come to a head, and the evil of Sodom reaches the heavens. G-d comes to a verdict: The city of Sodom must be destroyed. G-d shares the news with his trusted servant Avram, who proceeds to pray on behalf of the people of Sodom. He is unable to find a quorum of righteous people in whose merit the city should be saved. But Lot, at least, is spared the calamity. When the angels appear to rescue Lot, though, he is none too eager to join them. The angels drag him away, and he escapes with his life only moments before the city is destroyed. The final straw is when Lot's daughters awaken to the destruction around them and assume that they are the only ones left. They get their father drunk and become pregnant from him. News soon spreads of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughters, and Avram is forced to move away in shame.³ The common thread in this saga is that Avram is repeatedly disappointed and humiliated by the behavior of his nephew, yet he bails him out time and again. Avram was a leader—and it must have pained him greatly not to be able to exert more influence on his nephew. But Lot was his own person who made his own decisions. Why did Avram not simply let him live with the consequences? Why did Avram not make a clean break from Lot? Why did he keep swooping in to save Lot from himself? Was it classic codependency, or was there another dynamic at play? Perhaps Avram saw potential in Lot and kept trying to bring it to the fore. Chassidic teachings explain that Lot represents the part of the mind that is uncouth, unrefined.⁴ It's the part that behaves unpredictably, sometimes shamefully; the part that gets us into scrapes time and again; the part that

can drag us to the most desolate, degraded places—our personal Sodom. We try to distance ourselves, but can never quite escape from our Lot. And perhaps, on some level, we don't want to. And this is something that Avram bequeathed to us, his descendants: We will never give up on our Lot, whether it's a wayward child, an annoying neighbor—or ourselves. We don't give up because even the most unrefined and embarrassing person has potential waiting to be discovered. Lot's two daughters produced two sons, who grew into two mighty nations, Moab and Ammon. From Moab descended Ruth, the famous convert who became the great-grandmother of King David. From Ammon descended Naamah, wife of King Solomon, and mother of his firstborn son and heir, Rehoboam. Thus, the lineage of the dynasty of David, and by extension Moshiach, comes through Lot. Avram foresaw that Lot would be a forebear of King David and Moshiach. On the verse in Psalms, "I have found my servant David,"⁵ the Midrash comments, "Where did He find him? In Sodom!"⁶ The legacy of Lot is that no circumstance in life is so low or so depraved that no good can come from it. Avram's rescue of Lot empowers us to rescue ourselves and each other from the pits of Sodom—as many times as it takes—until we've refined our Lot to the utmost, and the world is finally ready for Moshiach. FOOTNOTES 1. Rashi on Genesis 13:8; Bereishit Rabbah 41:6. 2. Genesis 13:9. 3. Genesis 20:1; see Rashi's commentary. 4. Torah Ohr, Lech Lecha 22b. 5. Psalms 89:21. 6. Bereishit Rabbah 41:4. By Chaya Shuchat This is taken from the Chabad website and was written by Chaya Shuchat