Congregation Beth Israel
Of The Berkshires

CONGREGATION
Shir Ami

SoulSpa 3.4 • P. Vayera
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בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהו״ה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה׃	*Barukh Atah Adonai* *eloheinu melekh ha'olam* *asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu* *la'asok b'divrei Torah.*

Blessed are You, YHVH our God, sovereign of the world, who made us holy in connecting-command, and commanded us to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

Tough Torah >> where's the holiness?

WHY CAN'T AN OMNIPOTENT GOD BE A BETTER COMMUNICATOR???

Genesis 19:5-26 (excerpts)

וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ אַיֵּה
הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַלָּיְלָה
הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְנֵדָעָה אֹתָם׃ וַיֵּצֵא
אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתְחָה וְהַדֶּלֶת סָגַר
אַחֲרָיו׃ וַיֹּאמַר אַל־נָא אַחַי תָּרֵעוּ׃
הִנֵּה־נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ
אִישׁ אוֹצִיאָה־נָּא אֹתָן אֲלֵיכֶם וַעֲשׂוּ
לָהֶן כַּטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם רַק לָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵל
אַל־תַּעֲשׂוּ דָבָר כִּי־עַל־כֵּן בָּאוּ בְּצֵל
קֹרָתִי׃ ...

5-8. [Sodom's council and militia] shouted to Lot and said to him, "Where are the two [messengers] who came tonight to you? Bring them to us so we will @&!% them." Lot went out to the [mob] and shut the door behind him. He said, "Please, my brothers, do not do this evil thing. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and do with them as you please, but do not do with the others, as they came under the shade of my roof." …

Misogyny

Lot sending his daughters to be RAPED?!

וְאֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת הִכּוּ
בַּסַּנְוֵרִים מִקָּטֹן וְעַד־גָּדוֹל וַיִּלְאוּ
לִמְצֹא הַפָּתַח׃ וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶל־
לוֹט עֹד מִי־לְךָ פֹּה חָתָן וּבָנֶיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ
וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־לְךָ בָּעִיר הוֹצֵא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם׃
כִּי־מַשְׁחִתִים אֲנַחְנוּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם
הַזֶּה כִּי־גָדְלָה צַעֲקָתָם אֶת־פְּנֵי
יהו״ה וַיְשַׁלְּחֵנוּ יהו״ה לְשַׁחֲתָהּ׃

11-13. The [messengers] struck the [mob] at the entrance of the house, low and high alike, with blinding light so they could not find the entrance. The [messengers] said to Lot, "Whom else have you here? Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters, anyone else you have in the city – bring them out. We are about to destroy this place, for the outcry against them before YHVH became so great that YHVH sent us to destroy it."

Oh, dad, you're so funny.

וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל־חֲתָנָיו לֹקְחֵי
בְנֹתָיו וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִן־הַמָּקוֹם
הַזֶּה כִּי־מַשְׁחִית יהו״ה אֶת־הָעִיר
וַיְהִי כִמְצַחֵק בְּעֵינֵי חֲתָנָיו׃ וּכְמוֹ
הַשַּׁחַר עָלָה וַיָּאִיצוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים בְּלוֹט
לֵאמֹר קוּם קַח אֶת־אִשְׁתְּךָ וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי
בְנֹתֶיךָ הַנִּמְצָאֹת פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה בַּעֲוֹן
הָעִיר׃ וַיִּתְמַהְמָהּ וַיַּחֲזִיקוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים
בְּיָדוֹ וּבְיַד־אִשְׁתּוֹ וּבְיַד שְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו
בְּחֶמְלַת יהו״ה עָלָיו וַיֹּצִאֻהוּ וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ
מִחוּץ לָעִיר׃ וַיְהִי כְהוֹצִיאָם אֹתָם
הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הִמָּלֵט עַל־נַפְשֶׁךָ אַל־
תַּבִּיט אַחֲרֶיךָ... הִמָּלֵט פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה׃

14-17. Lot went, spoke to his sons-in-law… and said, "Up, get out of this place, for YHVH will destroy the city," but he was like a jester to his sons-in-law. At dawn, the messengers urged Lot on, saying, "Up, take your wife and two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city." He tarried, so the agents grabbed his hand, and the hands of his wife and his two daughters – in YHVH's mercy on him – took him out and left him outside the city. When they had brought them outside, one said, "Flee for your life! Do not look behind you…. Flee, lest you be swept away." …

why during day?

directly, not through a messenger

הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָצָא עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְלוֹט בָּא
צֹעַרָה׃ וַיהוה הִמְטִיר עַל־סְדֹם וְעַל
עֲמֹרָה גָּפְרִית וָאֵשׁ מֵאֵת וַיהוה מִן
הַשָּׁמָיִם׃ וַיַּהֲפֹךְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים הָאֵל
וְאֵת כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי... וַתַּבֵּט אִשְׁתּוֹ
מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נְצִיב מֶלַח׃

23-26. The sun rose on earth and Lot entered Tzo'ar. YHVH rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur-fire from YHVH from heaven. God upturned the cities… and all their inhabitants…. Lot's wife gazed behind him, and turned into a pillar of salt.

GOD "BEYOND"

memorial and/or punishment?

could you leave your place, your family, and not look back?

preciousness, covenantalism
preservation, ritual, faith

Rashi, Gen. 19:26

ותהי נציב מלח. בְּמֶלַח חָטְאָה וּבְמֶלַח לָקְתָה.

[She] became a pillar of salt - By salt she sinned and by salt was she punished (Gen. Rabbah 50:4).

Justification? JUSTICE.
GOD MUST BE JUST! ->
blame the victim?

(midrash) ecology

Genesis Rabbah 50:4

וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה, בְּבֵיתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ הָיָה שֶׁהָיָה מְקַבֵּל אֶת הָעוֹבְרִים.... א״ר יִצְחָק מַצּוּת גְּדוֹלָה עָמְדָה עַל הַמֶּלַח, דְּהוּא אָמַר לָהּ הַב לְאֵלֵּין אַכְסַנְיָא קַלִּיל מֶלַח, וַהֲוַת אָמְרָה לֵיהּ אַף הָדָא סוֹנִיתָא בִּישָׁא אַת בָּעֵי מֵילְפָא הָכָא.

"[Lot] made a feast for [the messengers]" (Gen. 19:3). In the house of his [uncle] Avraham, he learned to receive passersby. R. Yitzhak said: A great quarrel arose over the salt. [Lot] said to [his wife]: "Give these guests gathered to us a bit of salt." She said to him: "Will you accustom them to plenty in this place also?"

Mrs. Lot is stingy?
Mrs. Lot isn't seeing

Genesis Rabbah 51:5

וַתַּבֵּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו. רַבִּי יִצְחָק אָמַר שֶׁחָטְאָה בְּמֶלַח בְּאוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה שֶׁבָּאוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל לוֹט, מָה הִיא עוֹשָׂה הוֹלֶכֶת אֶל כָּל שְׁכֵנוֹתֶיהָ וְאוֹמֶרֶת לָהֶן תְּנוּ לִי מֶלַח שֶׁיֵּשׁ לָנוּ אוֹרְחִים, וְהִיא מְכַוֶּנֶת שֶׁיַּכִּירוּ בָּהֶן אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר, עַל כֵּן וַתְּהִי נְצִיב מֶלַח.

[She] became a pillar of salt – R. Yitzhak said: Because she sinned with salt on the night the [messengers] came to Lot. What did she do? She went to all her neighbors and said to them: "Give me salt, because we have guests" – and her intention was that the city residents should become aware of them. That is why she "became a pillar of salt."

Mrs. Lot publicized the "guests"?

Rabbeinu Bahya, Gen. 19:26

ותבט אשתו מאחריו... ומדרש בא עני על פתחה לשאול ממנה מלח ולא רצתה ליתן לו, ובשביל כן נענשה מדה כנגד מדה, היא חטאה במלח ולקתה בנציב מלח

His wife looked from behind him – In Midrash, a poor person came to`` her door to borrow salt and she refused to give any, so she was punished measure for measure: by salt she sinned and with a pillar of salt she was punished.

CHARACTER TRAIT

Mrs. Lot isn't neighborly?

Radak (R. David Kimhi), Gen. 19:26

ותבט אשתו מאחריו, אשתו שהיתה מאחרי לוט הביטה אחריה כי היתה קטנת אמונה והביטה אם נהפכה העיר... אע״פ ששמעה אזהרת המלאך ללוט.

His wife looked from behind him – His wife who had been behind him turned around, for she had little faith that the city would be upturned… though she overheard the angel warning Lot [that nobody should turn around].

It's Mr. Lot's fault for not protecting her?

Midrash Aggadah, Genesis 19:26

ותבט אשתו מאחריו. אחר שאמר לה המלאך אל תביט אחריך היתה נפשה הומה על בנותיה הנשארות בסדום:

[She] became a pillar of salt – After the angel said, "Do not look behind you," her soul was stirred regarding her daughters that remained in Sodom.

No fault: she's a *mom*!

עד
WITNESS

Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 25:11

עִידִית אִשְׁתּוֹ שֶׁל לוֹט נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמֶיהָ עַל בְּנוֹתֶיהָ הַנְּשׂוּאוֹת, וְהִבִּיטָה לַאֲחֹרֶיהָ לִרְאוֹת אִם הוֹלְכוֹת אַחֲרֶיהָ אִם לֹא, וְרָאֲתָה אַחֲרֶיהָ הַשְּׁכִינָה וְנַעֲשֵׂית נְצִיב מֶלַח

The pity of Idit, wife of Lot, stirred for her daughters, who were married in Sodom. She looked back behind her to see if they were coming after her or not. And she saw behind Shekhinah, so she became a pillar of salt….

She's the only one who really sees.

Ramban (Nahmanides), Gen. 19:26

מֵאַחֲרָיו - מֵאַחֲרֵי לוֹט, שֶׁהָיָה הוֹלֵךְ אַחֲרֵיהֶם מְאַסֵּף לְכָל בֵּיתוֹ מְמַהֲרִם לְהִמָּלֵט׃

From behind him – From behind Lot, who was following them, acting as the rearguard for all his household, who were hurrying to be saved.

Zohar, Pekudei 12:73

מֵאַחֲרָיו. מַאי מֵאַחֲרָיו. מֵאֲחוֹרֵי שְׁכִינְתָּא. אוּף הָכָא וַיִּפֶן אַחֲרָיו, אִסְתַּכַּל מֵאֲחוֹרֵי שְׁכִינְתָּא. וְחָמָא.

From behind him – What is behind him? Behind God's] *Shekhinah.* [The prophet Elisha] looked behind him, and saw behind him *Shekhinah,* and discerned that ….

B.T. Hagigah 13a

אמר רב אחא בר יעקב עוד רקיע אחד יש למעלה מראשי החיות דכתיב ודמות על ראשי החיה רקיע כעין הקרח הנורא ע"כ. … יש לך רשות לדבר מכאן ואילך אין לך רשות לדבר … במופלא ממך אל תדרוש ובמכוסה ממך אל תחקור במה שהורשית התבונן אין לך עסק בנסתרות.

R. Aha bar Jacob said, "There is one more heaven above the *Hayot*," as in (Ezek. 1:22), "The likeness of heaven was on the heads of the *Hayyot*, like the color of awesome ice stretched above their heads." ... Up to here, you have permission to speak but from here you have no permission – …"Don't inquire what's too wondrous for you: you have no business investigating the secrets [of heaven]."

The Torah: A Women's Commentary

His wife looked behind him... This is precisely what Lot is warned against. Nowhere does the text indicate that he passes this information to his wife and daughters. The question remains: Does Lot's wife not know about the warning – or does she look back in spite of it?

…and became a pillar of salt. She is reluctant to ignore what happens to those she leaves behind, and this concern costs her life. Some things are worth our lives. Compassion, even amidst "justice"

Frankel, The Five Books of Miriam

OUR DAUGHTERS ASK: Why does Lot's wife look back?

EDITH, THE ONE-WHO-LOOKS-BACK (WHOM THE RABBIS NAMED *IDIT*): I looked back at all that I had left behind, my other daughter's grave, my friends and relatives, my home with its cherished mementos, my childhood – and I wept. And so hot was the desert sun and the brimstone torching Sodom that my flowing tears dried instantly, turning me into a pillar of salt.

THE RABBIS ADD: Her turning into a pillar of salt is an example of the divine principle, *midah keneged midah*, "measure for measure." Lot's wife brought this fate upon herself through indiscretion: When the two angels came to stay in Lot's house, Lot prudently kept their visit a secret, but his wife goes to a neighbor to borrow salt to cook for them – and so gives them away. Because of her thoughtlessness, she pays back the borrowed salt with her life.

Jewish Women's Archive

Tamar Kadari

The pillar of salt was left by God as a memorial for all time (*Yalkut Shimoni* on Esth., para. 1056). Moses saw the pillar of Lot's wife when God showed him all the land of Canaan before his death (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, *Masekhta de-Amalek*, *Beshalah* 2).

Rabbi Amy Josefa Ariel, 2017

You shall season your every offering of meal with salt; you shall not omit from your meal offering the salt of your covenant with God; with all your offerings you must offer salt. (Lev. 2:13)

All the sacred gifts that the Israelites set aside for God I give to you, to your sons, and to the daughters that are with you, as a due for all time. It shall be an everlasting covenant of salt before God for you and for your offspring as well. (Num. 18:19)

Surely you know that the God of Israel gave David kingship over Israel forever—to him and his sons—by a covenant of salt. (2 Chron. 13:5)

"I wasn't jealous." She sounds put off, but also deeply sad. The ox she leads has no bells on its horns.

"Okay," I say.

"When those men came, how was I to know they were angels?" she asks. She looks at me expectantly.

"Okay," I say again.

"If you think I'm going to tell you my story, you are mistaken," she points at me.

"Okay," I half-turn to continue on my own.

"Lot never thought he was good enough. He was always comparing himself to Abraham and me to Sarah," Idit says. I keep walking with her and hold my peace. "It was tiresome," she says and then waits for me to respond.

"It sounds tiresome," I say.

"'Bake cakes like Sarah does.' 'Care for the animals like Sarah does.' 'Welcome guests like Sarah does.' Think it ever occurred to him that I might like to do things 'like Idit does'? Like my mother did and her mother before her? What was wrong with our ways?"

She's asking rhetorically, but, I mean, the woman was from Sodom. The ways of Sodom were ways of scarcity, radical unhospitality and incivility. I raise an eyebrow, but continue to listen to what she has to say.

"Does he ask me if it's okay with me if he brings home guests? Of course he doesn't. Nevermind that it's more mouths to feed. Nevermind that our home is already small and crowded. Nevermind that we are in the midst of planning the wedding of our third child. Nevermind that I already have enough to do. No, never you mind, just,

'Idit, go get more salt and bake cakes like Sarah for these guests.'" Her voice is getting louder and louder. People are turning to look at us, but no one stops to greet her. "It's an ill wind that blows no good. I knew those men would bring us bad luck. 'If you want to welcome them,' I said to Lot, 'You bake the cakes, you prepare their beds, and you clean up after them when they leave.' Do you think he listened to me?" I don't respond. "Well DO you?" Idit presses.

"No," I say quietly.

"No! Of course not! That man is insufferable!" She sounds triumphant, but looks about to crumble.

"What did you do?" I ask with trepidation.

"Oh, I went and got more salt. 'Oh, my head!' I said to my neighbors. 'Oh, my back!' 'And wouldn't you know it, Mr. Too-Big-For-His-Britches brought home guests and now I have to bake them cakes! Have any salt to spare?'"

"I thought the people of Sodom didn't share like that with their neighbors," I say.

"What? Oh. Well, most of the women didn't give me a thing. Some gave me a teaspoonful of salt," she says, shrugging and tugging at the ox's lead.

"You asked them all?" I ask, now understanding.

"Every. Single. One. Lot wanted to invite guests, fine. Everyone would know about it."

"So it was because of you that everyone in Sodom knew the angels were in your house," I say.

Idit looks at me without turning her head. "Judging me now?" she coughs a wet, rattly cough and clears her throat. "Just like Lot. You know that Sarah, she wasn't so perfect. She threw out that woman and her child."

"Hagar? They were walking together a few weeks ago," I say.

"What?" shouts Idit. "That's impossible!"

"Hard to imagine, maybe," I say. "Even unexpected. Not impossible."

Idit sniffs. "Well, I made sure everyone in Sodom knew about Lot's guests, didn't I?"

I say nothing. Something has changed in her tone. Her voice almost cracked. Her steps have slowed and become heavy.

"They stormed my house, you know."

"What did you think would happen?" I ask.

"I didn't think of what would happen," she says. "I was upset. Years, a lifetime, raising a houseful of children, and still Lot wants me to be someone I am not. Why did he marry me if he didn't want . . . me." It isn't a question. "They stormed my house. They demanded the guests. And my husband . . ." her voice trails off. "My husband offered them our daughters. My daughters. He never even looked at me that night. He

never looked at the girls. In the end I guess he was just like Abraham, sacrificing his own children," her voice catches.

Wind whips around us and stirs up a small dirt devil. It stirs up the smell of the ox, too.

"And you were like Sarah," I say.

"What?" Idit looks confused, disrupted.

"Sarah also died when her child was taken and offered."

"Those girls didn't die, though," she says.

"Neither did Isaac," I say.

"I'll concede the point, but I am nothing like Sarah," she says.

"Okay," I say.

Idit takes a deep breath and wipes her eyes with the hem of her sleeve.

"Everyone else did," she says.

"What?"

"Everyone else. My elderly mother, my neighbors, the young men who were to be my sons in law - marriages I had worked hard to arrange, my other two daughters and their husbands, their children . . . everyone. How is it merciful to be allowed to be the one who survives that?" A harsh laugh escapes her lungs. "How is that a blessing? How was I to go on into a world without my children and grandchildren?"

My heart aches with hers.

"You know my name, Idit, means witness, yes?" she asks me.

"Yes."

"Some things are too much to see, too much to bear, but I am a mother. I am a mother and we bear. . . we bear the unbearable. Lot went on ahead unwilling to face what was happening to our children and grandchildren. I turned and looked. I watched God turn his back on me."

Moses saw the pillar of Idit when God showed him all the land of Canaan before his death. In the Talmud, Berakhot 54a-b we are taught to say two blessings when we see her.

"Blessed be the One who remembers the righteous," I say. "Baruch dayan emet, Blessed be the true judge," I say, but it doesn't feel like enough. I pause a moment and then add, "Blessed is the one who counts our tears."