

So Avram went as Hashem had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. (12:4)

Lot was Avraham *Avinu's* nephew, whom the Patriarch took in and supported following the untimely death of his brother, Haran, at the hands of Nimrod. Nimrod had his followers throw Avraham into a fiery furnace. He challenged Haran to choose between Nimrod and Avraham. Haran wanted to "hedge" his bets, first waiting to see what would happen to Avraham before he made his choice. If Avraham would emerge from the furnace unscathed, then Haran would support him. If Avraham would suffer a tragic death, then Haran was not interested in adding to the toll. He would then support Nimrod. When Avraham miraculously emerged from the flames, Haran sided with him, and he was promptly flung into the furnace. Since Haran's commitment was contingent on being spared – not on his conviction – he was not saved. He did not enjoy the same results as did his brother, Avraham. Nonetheless, since he died *al Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem's Name, he merited Lot, the son who would be the link in the Messianic dynasty, from which Rus and then David *Hamelech* would emerge.

We understand why Avraham left his land and family. Hashem commanded him to leave. This was one of his *nisyonos*, trials. Why did Lot go along? It was Avraham's trial – not Lot's. Lot left everything to follow Avraham to a yet to be determined destination. Avraham had no idea where he was going, and, by extension, neither did Lot. In the end, as a result of Lot's tagging along, he eventually split with Avraham and went to Sodom, where Avraham later saved him. As a later caveat, he fathered two sons, from whom descended Rus *Ha'Moviah* and Naamah *Ha'Amonis* – all because he accompanied Avraham.

This does not explain Lot's original motivation in deciding to accompany Avraham. *Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita*, quotes the *Sefas Emes* who posits that Lot merited to be a link in the chain that leads to *Moshiach* solely because his father, Haran, died *al Kiddush Hashem*. Now Lot saw all of this: Avraham lived; his father Haran died. He deduced that, for the rest of his life, he would follow Avraham, because he had demonstrated his full commitment to Hashem. Avraham was deeply committed to Lot's welfare. Thus, even though Hashem did not appear to Avraham as long as Lot was in his proximity, Avraham felt that he could not turn his back on his nephew. It was Lot who ultimately ceded from Avraham. While he did maintain some *emunah*, faith in Hashem, it was insufficient to sustain him in the long run. At some point, his faith gave out.

Emunah is translated as faith. It is the unwavering belief in the Almighty – and only in the Almighty. It is an inherent conviction, a perception of truth that transcends reason. One who is a *maamin*, believer, is certain. He believes even when reason gives up or his belief is beyond rationale. Some people have *emunah peshutah*, simple faith, which means they rely on the faith of others. Their conviction is solid, but not profound. Some have a level of *emunah* in which the believer feels this truth to be part of himself, of his essence and being. Thus, such a person will readily relinquish his life for his conviction, because essentially his life is his *emunah*. (Obviously, this subject extends far

beyond the parameters of this paper.) *Horav Mordechai Pogremonsky, zl*, was one of the greatest *illuyim*, geniuses, of the last century, who was introduced to Torah study at the age of fourteen. It was *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, who discovered him and brought him to Kelm. Shortly thereafter he went to Telshe, where he grew in learning. He visited a number of *yeshivos* for the purpose of absorbing the essence of each one and integrating its distinct approach to *avodas hakodesh*, service to the Almighty, into his own *avodas Hashem*. His learning experience extended as well to *Chassidus*, but ultimately he employed the teaching of *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, to be his guide to life. Between his Torah genius, which enabled him to consume and absorb the depth of *Torah She'B'ksav* and *She'Baal Peh*, Written and Oral law with its commentaries, and his deep-rooted yearning to refine himself to better serve Hashem, *Rav Mottel* (as he was reverently called) became the exemplar of a Torah Jew, a scholar without peer. He was totally immersed in Torah and *avodah*, service, of the Almighty. His *emunah* in Hashem was his reality. To him, the Torah was a living reality. When he studied, he was one with the Torah.

During the war, *Rav Mordechai* was incarcerated in the Kovno Ghetto. It was there that his commitment to Torah, *halachah* and *avodas Hashem* were evident. He demonstrated them on a regular basis. He never sat on a chair in the ghetto, sitting instead on a large stone which he had designated for his own personal use. He explained that all the furniture in the ghetto had previously been owned by other Jews, everyone's personal effects had been jumbled together. Thus, he had no way of ascertaining to whom any given piece of furniture belonged. Any chair might belong to a Jew who was still alive and had hopes of one day retrieving his possessions. Whoever used that chair was a thief.

Despite the intense tribulations to which the Jews interred in the ghetto were subjected, *Rav Mordechai's emunah* remained firm and unwavering. He once declared to a group of Jews, "What do you see when you look around? You see German soldiers and the ghetto walls which surround us. I see only Hashem, our eternal Protector, guarding us and watching over us. That guard could lift his rifle and shoot us all – and nothing would happen to him. What is preventing him from killing us? Hashem! He does not allow him to hurt us." On another occasion, he turned to a *yeshivah* student in the ghetto and asked, "What do you think Hashem wants from us at this time?" When no immediate response was forthcoming, *Rav Mordechai* said, "He wants us to feel that, without His help, we would not exist for one moment."

Twice, he escaped from the jaws of death. On the first occasion, the Nazis raided the ghetto, searching for all adult men. *Rav Mordechai* hid behind a door in an upstairs room and went undetected, despite the fact that they searched the area multiple times. He said, "I just spent the entire time focusing on *Ein od milvado*; There is no other (entity) than Him."

The second occasion took place in 1945, when the Germans, fearing the Russian Army, attempted to liquidate the ghetto of its Jewish inmates. They were bent on annihilating every last Jew. *Rav Mordechai* was living in an attic together with his student, *Rav Avraham Yitzchak Winkelstein, zl*, and a few others. The Nazis demolished building after building and murdered its residents who

had somehow stayed alive until then. *Rav* Mordechai was about to flee, but *Rav* Avraham Yitzchak encouraged him to stay. He listened. The Nazis demolished the entire building except for one pillar, which, unbeknownst to them, supported the attic. Satisfied that no one could have survived the demolition, the Nazis left, allowing for the inhabitants of the attic to escape. The very next day, the Nazis returned and burned the building to the ground. For the rest of his life, *Rav* Mordechai harbored a profound sense of gratitude to *Rav* Avraham Yitzchak. This was one more miracle in the life of a Torah giant who saw Hashem in every avenue, at every juncture, of his short life.