

So Lot raised his eyes and saw the entire plain of Jordan... and Lot journeyed from the east. (13:10,11)

Rashi (quoting the *Midrash*) explains that Lot was not simply distancing himself from Avraham *Avinu* in a geographical sense, but was actually distancing himself *m'Kadmono shel Olam*, the Ancient One of the world (*kedem* can also be understood as “before” i.e., ancient one), *Hashem Yisborach*. Lot separated himself from Avraham and everything he represented, saying, “I want neither Avraham nor his G-d.” *Chazal* attribute this declaration to Lot. It is a strong statement, especially since Lot did not have a history of harboring any negativity towards his uncle, Avraham, or Avraham’s G-d, Hashem. On the contrary, we see Lot prepared to relinquish his life to protect his guests. He baked *matzos* in honor of *Pesach* (as he had seen Avraham do in the past). Nonetheless, as explained by the *Alter, zl, m’Kelm, Chazal* deduced that since Lot had been prepared to uproot himself from the sanctity of Avraham’s home, to relocate to Sodom, a city filled with inhabitants who were the essence of evil, who mistreated anyone who had the misfortune to visit their community, it was evident that Lot’s *mitzvah* observance was not indicative of his true spiritual essence. He was an *apikores*, heretic, who denied Hashem. Anyone who truly believed in Hashem could not sanction such a move.

Mitzvah observance is not the barometer of true commitment. It is one’s *hashkafos*, philosophic perspective, his outlook on life and living, that tells us who he is and in what he believes. People might perform *mitzvos* out of habit; thus their actions have no impact on their *hashkafah*. This is noticeable when we see *mitzvah* observant Jews maintain abiding relationships with individuals who are morally, ethically and spiritually flawed. They support them and even join in their Torah-negative endeavors.

At the end of the day, what did Lot actually benefit from his radical move to Sodom? Nothing? Less than nothing. Had he remained with Avraham, he would have been spiritually and materially wealthy. He left Sodom with nothing but his life. True, he had initially been wealthy until Hashem declared the decree to destroy Sodom. Wealth that does not last (which is the case with all physical/material bounty) is not something for which one should sacrifice himself. It is only the benefits of the spirit which endure and leave a lasting legacy to be imparted to future generations.

Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, supports this idea with the reward Avraham received for refusing to accept financial remuneration from the King of Sodom. “[I refuse to accept anything from you], so much as a thread to a shoe strap; I shall not take anything of yours! So you shall not say, “It is I who made Avram rich” (14:23). As a result of declining the two strings: thread, shoe strap, Avraham’s descendants merited the *mitzvah* of *techeiles* (*Tzitzis*) and *Tefillin*, both “cords” which engender enduring spiritual reward. All this was because Avraham refused to allow a pagan to say that he supported Avraham. Avraham could not permit the *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem’s Name, which such a statement engendered. Money meant nothing to Avraham if its source was murky. Lot did not have such inhibitions. He paid dearly for his error. This is an oft-

repeated error, whereby we exchange a budding spiritual fortune for its material counterpart. This is tantamount to swapping our future for the present, forgetting that a present that does not have concrete hope for the future is not much of a present.

Rav Neiman relates that during World War I, the *Mashgiach* of Lomza, *Horav Moshe Rozenstein, zl*, told him that the *Menahel* of Lomza, *Horav Eliezer Shulovitz, zl*, hired him as *Mashgiach*. At the time, he determined how much would be needed to support the *Mashgiach* and his family. *Rav Rozenstein* was considering requesting a higher salary, since he was well aware that his daughters would soon be of marriageable age, and they would require a dowry. He remarked that had he refused the money, *Rav Shulovitz* would have acquiesced. He decided that he would not request a raise in salary, trusting that Hashem would reward him for his devotion to his students. When the war broke out, the banks went under because the Russian currency no longer had any value. *Rav Rozenstein* said to *Rav Neiman*, “Had I asked for the raise, I would have taken the money and deposited it in the bank. I would now have nothing. Instead, I did not take the money and instead I left it up to Hashem to see to my dowry. My daughters married exceptional *bnei Torah*. (Sadly, the entire family was murdered by the Nazis.)

Horav Mordechai Shmukler, zl, was one of the premier students of *Yeshivas Radin* under the direction of the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*. When he married, he received from his father-in-law a large sum of money to invest in business. Being a close student of the *Chafetz Chaim*, he consulted with his *Rebbe* concerning his future plans. The holy *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, told him, “When a *ben Torah* marries and makes plans to abandon Torah life for a life in the field of commerce, if he is truly fortunate, he will lose all of his money immediately. Then, he still has time to return to the *yeshivah* to learn and become a *rav* or *rosh yeshivah*. If he does not have *mazel*, good fortune, it will be an extended period before he loses his fortune. By then, he will have forgotten his learning and be left bereft of both: his money and his learning.”

The *Chafetz Chaim* blessed him that his material assets not be around long enough for him to forget his learning. The *brachah* was realized with *Rav Mordechai's* first investment. As a result, he became a distinguished *rosh yeshivah* who inspired many students with his erudition and analytical ability.