

Parashat Vayera: Lot's Moral Agency

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

1. Lot and His Daughters

Bereishit 19:6-9	
<p>וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתַח וְהִדְלִית סָגַר אַחֲרָיו: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־נָא אַחֵי תִרְעוּ: הִנֵּה־נָא לִי שְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ אִישׁ אוֹצִיָּאהָ־נָא אֶתְהֶן אֵלֵיכֶם וַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶן כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם רֹק לְאִנָּשִׁים הָאֵל אֶל־תַּעֲשׂוּ דָּבָר כִּי־עַל־כֵּן בָּאוּ בְּצֹל קִרְתִּי: וַיֹּאמְרוּ גִשְׁתְּהֶלָּא וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֶחָד בָּא־לְגוֹר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט עֲתָה נֵרַע לָךְ מֵהֶם וַיַּפְצְרוּ בְּאִישׁ בְּלוֹט מְאֹד וַיִּגָּשׁוּ לְשֹׁכֵר הַדֹּלֶת:</p>	<p>So Lot went out to them to the entrance, shut the door behind him, and said, "I beg you, my friends, do not commit such a wrong. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you please; but do not do anything to the others, since they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they said, "Stand back! The fellow," they said, "came here as an alien, and already he acts the ruler! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." And they pressed hard against the man—against Lot—and moved forward to break the door.</p>
Bereishit 19:32-33	
<p>לָכֵן נִשְׁקָה אֶת־אֲבִינוּ יִין וְנִשְׁכְּבָה עִמּוֹ וְנַחֲיָה מֵאֲבִינוּ זָרַע: וַתִּשְׁקֶינּוּ אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יִין בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַתָּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אֲבִיהָ וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשֹׁכְבָהּ וּבִקְוָמָהּ:</p>	<p>Come, let us make our father drink wine, and let us lie with him, that we may maintain life through our father." That night they made their father drink wine, and the older one went in and lay with her father; he did not know when she lay down or when she rose.</p>

2. Lot's Moral Agency

Bavli Horayot 10b	
<p>אֵלָּא מִשָּׁל לְלוֹט וּשְׁתֵּי בָנוֹתָיו, הֵן שֶׁנִּתְכַּוְּנוּ לְשֵׁם מִצְוָה – "צַדִּיקִים יִלְכוּ בָם", הוּא שֶׁנִּתְכַּוְּנוּ לְשֵׁם עֲבִירָה – "וּפְשָׁעִים יִכָּשְׁלוּ בָם".</p>	<p>Rather, it is analogous to the incident involving Lot and his two daughters (see Genesis 19:30–38): With regard to the daughters, who, when engaging in intercourse with their father, intended their action for the sake of a mitzva, as they believed that the world had been destroyed and that only they remained alive, it is written: "The righteous will walk in them." With regard to Lot, who intended his action for the sake of a transgression, it is written: "And transgressors will stumble in them."</p>
<p>וְדִלְמָא הוּא נִמְי לְשֵׁם מִצְוָה (הוּא מְכַוֵּן) [אֵיכָּאן!] אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, כָּל הַפְּסוּק הַזֶּה לְשֵׁם</p>	<p>The Gemara challenges: Perhaps Lot too intended his action for the sake of a mitzva. Rabbi Yohanan says that this entire verse: "And Lot cast his eyes and</p>

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

עבירה נאמר.	beheld the entire plain of the Jordan that it was well watered everywhere" (Genesis 13:10), is stated in the context of transgression.
<p>"וישא לוט" – "ותשא אשת אדניו את עיניה", "את עיניו" – "ויאמר שמשון [וגו'] אותה קח לי כי היא ישרה בעיני", "וירא אותה שכם בן חמור", "את כל כפר הירדן" – "כי בעד אשה זונה עד כפר לחם", "כי כלה משקה" – "אלכה אחרי מאהבי נתני לחמי ומימי צמרי ופשתי שמני ושקוני".</p>	<p>He explains: "And Lot cast his eyes" is an allusion to the verse: "His master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph and said: Lie with me" (Genesis 39:7). "His eyes" is an allusion to the verse: "And Samson said: Get her for me, as she is pleasing to my eyes" (Judges 14:3). "And beheld" is an allusion to the verse: "And Shechem, son of Hamor, the prince of the land, beheld her; and he took her and lay with her" (Genesis 34:2). "The entire plain [kikar] of the Jordan" is an allusion to the verse: "For on account of a prostitute a man is brought to a loaf [kikar] of bread" (Proverbs 6:26). "That it was well watered [mashke] everywhere" is an allusion to the verse "I will follow my lovers, givers of my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink [veshikkuyai]" (Hosea 2:7).</p>
<p>והא מינס אניס! תנא משום רבי יוסי בר רבי חוני: למה נקוד על וי שבו קומה? של בכירה? לומר לה, ששכבה לא ידע אבל בקומה ידע. ומאי הוה ליה למעבד? מאי דהוה הוה! נפקא מינה דלפניא אחרינא לא איבעי ליה למישתי.</p>	<p>Why is Lot accused of wrongdoing? Wasn't he the victim of circumstances beyond his control, as he was drunk and asleep? It is taught in the name of Rabbi Yosei bar Rabbi Honi: Why is it dotted over the letter vav that is in the word "bekumah" written with regard to Lot's elder daughter? It is to say to you that when she lay down he did not know; but when she arose, he knew. And what was he to do? What was, was. The Gemara answers: He should have derived from it that on the following night he should not drink. Since he drank again, this indicates that he did so with intent to engage in intercourse.</p>

Rashi on Bereishit 33:3	
<p>ובקומה. של בכירה נקוד, לומר, שבקומה ידע, ואעפ"כ לא נשמר ליל שני מלשתות. אמר רבי לוי כל מי שהוא להוט אחר בזלמוס של עריות לסוף מאכילים אותו מבשרו:</p>	<p>ובקומה— This word where it occurs with reference to the elder sister (Genesis 19:33) has dots above it (as though it is not written at all), implying that when she arose, he (Lot) was aware of it, and yet he did not take care on the second night to abstain from wine. (Horayot 10b.) R. Levi said, Whoever is inflamed by sexual desire will, in the end, be made to eat his own flesh (Genesis Rabbah 51:9).</p>

Devora Steinmetz, <i>From the Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis</i> , 149	
<p>[Genesis promotes]...the idea that individuals...choose their own destiny...Whether these individuals receive the blessing or find themselves in exile, apart from the patriarchal heritage, depends finally on their own choices. The destiny of the individual is not shaped ultimately by the acts of others, or by nationality, or by lineage, or by divine choice. Thus...Lot is excluded from Abraham's destiny not simply because Abraham fails to include him but because Lot consistently makes the wrong choices when given an opportunity to choose.</p>	