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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת לך לך

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָם אֶל שָׂרַי, הֲנִי שָׂפְחָתְךָ בְיָדְךָ עָשִׂי לָהּ הַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ, וְתַעֲנֶה שָׂרַי וְתִבְרַח מִפְּנֵיהָ. וַיִּמְצְאָהּ מַלְאָךְ ה' וְכו'. וַיֹּאמֶר הָגָר שְׂפֹחַת שָׂרַי אֵי מַזָּה בָּאת וְאָנָּה תֵלְכִי, וְתֹאמְרִי מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גְבוּרָתִי אֲנֹכִי בְרַחְתִּי. וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַלְאָךְ ה' שׁוּבִי אֶל גְבוּרָתְךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַחַת יָדֶיהָ. (בראשית טז, ו-ט)

Avrom said to Sarai, "Behold! – your maidservant is in your hand; do to her as you see fit." And Sarai afflicted her, so she fled from her. An angel of Hashem found her, and he said, "Hagar, maidservant of Sarai, from where have you come and where are you going?" And she said, "I am running away from Sarai my mistress." And an angel of Hashem said to her, "Return to your mistress, and be afflicted under her hands." (Bereishis 16:6-9)

This week's *Sidrah* relates the account of Hagar, who after marrying Avrohom acted contemptuously toward Soroh Imeinu. Soroh then dealt harshly with Hagar, leading her to flee. She was later discovered by a *malach*, who inquired regarding her reason for escape and encouraged her to return, even though her circumstances were challenging.

The Seforno explains that the *malach's* remark was cautionary: "אֵי מַזָּה בָּאת - Consider well *from where you have come* – a holy place and house of *tzaddikim*. וְאָנָּה תֵלְכִי - *and where you are going* – leaving Eretz Yisroel, to an unclean land and place of wicked people." He thus tried to inspire her to turn back for the spiritual nourishment of her soul. She replied: "מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גְבוּרָתִי אֲנֹכִי בְרַחְתִּי" – I have no particular destination; I am merely fleeing from my mistress."

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* cites R' Simcha Zissel of Kelm, who questions this dialogue. Since Hagar had addressed the *malach's* argument, what further claim did the *malach* have to persuade her to return?

R' Simcha Zissel explains that Hagar reasoned that the spiritual standing she had gained from being part of Avrohom's household was strong enough to resist foreign or external influences. She assumed that the lofty level of *emunah* she developed in Avrohom's presence would ensure her spiritual survival in any situation or environment. The *malach*, however, informed her that this was not the case. When someone is near a *tzaddik*, their *kedushah* creates a unique atmosphere that enables one to perceive things as they truly are, making it easier to resist sin. If Hagar were to leave these holy surroundings, she would risk losing her understanding of right and wrong, which could lead her to be swayed by her desires and ultimately be corrupted by sin.

The *malach* replied: שׁוּבִי אֶל גְבוּרָתְךָ וְהִתְעַנִּי תַחַת יָדֶיהָ, *Return to your mistress, and be afflicted under her hands*. He encouraged Hagar to return to that holy environment, even though it meant she would face further oppression. Not only did he insist that she return *despite* the suffering involved, but he also highlighted that this affliction would ultimately be beneficial for her.¹ A life free of troubles, filled

¹ The Chovos HaLevavos (*Sh. HaPerishus* 6) highlights several instances in the Torah and Chazal that call for abstinence and moderation in physical desires. Furthermore, there are designated times for fasting as a means of *teshuvah*. He

with the comforts and luxuries of this world, can lead one down a slippery path to sin. Hardships and adversities help realign one's spiritual priorities and preserve one's spiritual state. The *malach* was advising Hagar that only by returning to the special home of Avrohom and Soroh, would she be able to maintain the spiritual levels she had previously attained. Additionally, the very suffering she would experience under Soroh would serve to help her grow in *madreigah*.

This concept can clarify another incident in this week's *Sidrah*: Lot's sin when moving away from Avrohom. The *possuk* states (13:11): וַיִּבְחַר לוֹ לֹט אֶת כָּל כַּפְר הַיַּרְדֵּן, וַיֵּסַע לֹט מִקְדָּם, וַיִּפְרְדוּ אִישׁ מֵעַל אָחָיו, *And Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Yarden, and Lot journeyed from the East; and they parted, each man from his brother.* Rashi cites the Midrashic interpretation which interprets קָדָם here as a reference to Hashem as the שָׁל עוֹלָם, *the Forerunner of the world.* Lot said, "I want neither Avrohom nor his G-d."

R' Simcha Zissel raises the question of the severity of Lot's sin. What was so terrible about his actions that it could be viewed as renouncing his connection to Hashem and Avrohom? He explains, referencing the message given to Hagar, that distancing oneself from the presence of the righteous jeopardises one's entire spiritual future. Lot's departure from Avrohom's home was so significant that it was akin to belittling his previous values and rejecting both Hashem and Avrohom.

He further suggests that perhaps this message may have been part of what the *malach* was conveying to Hagar. The *malach* was urging her to learn a lesson from Lot. Lot had left Avrohom's household, and over time, the rift would become absolute and irreversible, (to the extent that his male descendants would be prohibited from entering Klal Yisroel). Hagar was meant to absorb this lesson and carefully consider her decision to flee from Avrohom's home and the spiritual enclave it represented.

The magnitude of this lesson cannot be overstated. Rabbeinu Yonah writes (*Mishlei* 1:8) that there are several preparatory steps one must take to ensure success in serving Hashem. Firstly, one should surround oneself with good people who can teach him the ways of Hashem and correct him if he errs. Secondly, one must be very cautious about joining a bad group or befriending sinful people who may lead him astray.

We must understand the importance of living in righteous surroundings, even when it is challenging, rather than in negative environments. Both Hagar and Lot reached impressive levels of *emunah* and greatness while in the home of the righteous Avrohom. However, they could only maintain their spiritual development by staying close to the *tzaddik*. Lot chose to leave and subsequently lost all the *madreigos* he had achieved, while Hagar was instructed by the *malach* to return home despite the difficulties involved. May we be *zoche* to establish our homes and families in settings that are conducive and contribute to *ruchniyus* growth.

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explains the reason for this: indulging in one's desires can be a powerful cause for sin while restricting materialistic cravings helps safeguard oneself and fosters a closer relationship with Hashem.