

Last week's parsha focused on the lives of many women. This week's parsha discusses women as well.

Last week, when Lot and his family were fleeing the destruction of S'dom, the malochim instructed them not to look back. Make sure to sever all emotional connection with S'dom, otherwise you will join in their fate. Lot's wife did look back, and as a result, she turned into a pillar of salt.

Lot was made to realize that his moving to S'dom in pursuit of wealth was a total disaster. The malochim encouraged Lot to be taken back to Avrohom where he can start all over again and regain his original madreigoh. Lot says he cannot go back to that higher madreigoh. He fled with his two daughters to some cave in the area. He allowed himself to get drunk and have two children with them.

These two daughters realized that they were saved by Hashem from the destruction of S'dom due to the merit of Avrohom Ovinu. So how could they claim there were no other men in the world? They knew Avrohom and his household remained safe! They knew the whole world outside their region still existed. But because Lot refused to go back to Avrohom, his daughters were stuck in this region where no one was suitable to marry them, so they decided to commit incest in order to have children.

Parshas Vayeiroh also had Hogor – the daughter of Pharaoh, who became a maidservant to Soroh. She was a truly righteous woman – worthy of being Avrohom's wife! But throughout her life she remains an Egyptian maidservant. Despite her greatness, this identity never left her all those years living in Avrohom's household. This is why when she was banished from that household by Soroh, she brought Yishmael straight to Egypt to find a wife. This was the people that she most strongly identified with.

In this week's parsha, we have Rivka Imeinu. She is hidden in the background for most of the parsha.

Avrohom has a chief Eved Canaani – Eliezer – who was in charge of Avrohom's estate. Chazal praise Eliezer as Avrohom's foremost talmid who achieved total self-control, mastered all of Avrohom's teachings and taught them to others. Eliezer had a daughter, and he naturally assumed his daughter was perfectly suitable to be a wife for Yitzchok. So when Avrohom asked Eliezer to pursue the prospects for a shidduch for Yitzchok in far-away Choron, Eliezer understandably asked Avrohom: what about his own daughter right here in Canaan?

Avrohom replied unequivocally – I am 'Boruch' and you are 'Arur'. An arur cannot marry a boruch. Avrohom didn't like Eliezer's yichus. This is despite the fact that Eliezer has all the maalos imaginable! And compare this with the alternative! Avrohom prefers a girl from the house of Lovon and Besuel, who are Idol worshippers and massive swindlers? How does this make sense?

When you look at all the pesukim describing Eliezer's mission to get Rivka, he is never mentioned by name. He is an anonymous slave. At one point in the middle, he is alternating between being a man and a slave. And then at the end of the mission, he goes back to only being a slave again.

What is the definition of a slave? A slave is someone who has no identity of his own. His life is an extension of his master. He will submit his will to do everything his master wants. He has no capacity to make an independent connection to Hashem. His entire connection to

Hashem, who is infinite, comes through his master, Avrohom. Only a free man can make a personal relationship with a Being beyond any conceivable limits.

The problem with avodo zoro is the inability to relate to a dimension that goes beyond this created universe. Non-Jews need to relate to Hashem through some kind of intermediate spiritual force which is inherently limited and connected to the world. Most people are just incapable of getting out of their material lives and connecting to something beyond the physical. A slave cannot go beyond his own self interests. His entire sense of self is dominated by his master's identity.

When does Eliezer break free and become a man? At the point where he decides to put his own interests aside and get another girl for Yitzchok instead of his own daughter. At first Eliezer hesitated, and that is why there is a shalshales. Eliezer makes an impossible condition that Rivka must fulfil in order to be chosen. She has to give water to all of his assistants and all of his camels. These camels store a tremendous amount of water in order to make the trip across the desert from Canaan! To give all of them water was an unbelievable gesture of chesed that Eliezer demanded!

Then, Rivka comes out and she actually starts to fulfill this impossible condition. Eliezer has to decide if he will accept the sign Hashem is sending to choose Rivka or sabotage the mission. Ultimately, he decides to go through with the mission to take the girl from Avrohom's family which will preclude his own daughter from getting the shidduch. So, from this moment on, Eliezer is referred to as a man. After the decision is final, and there is no way to go back without Rivka, Eliezer is no longer capable of making his own decisions and he goes back to being a slave.

There is an ability to have a relationship with Hashem, Who is way beyond this world, only if you are Boruch – only if you are kodosh and can lift yourself beyond the limits of your physical being and self-interests.

In last week's parsha, Hashem noted that Avrohom has mastered the middos of chesed and emes and will certainly impart those middos to his offspring. Now, in this parsha, Rivka is being tested to see if she has those same two middos in order to be worthy of joining Avrohom Ovinu's family. She already demonstrated her capacity for tremendous chesed. What about her commitment to emes? Eliezer gives her a choice – are you coming to his house, which is totally devoid of avodo zoro and committed exclusively to the emes? Remember, if you come now, you are never going back.

Rivka doesn't hesitate for a moment. She immediately says yes. She is leaving this confused house in Choron with the parting blessing from her brother and mother, and is never coming back. She doesn't want a confused household. She is making up her mind to completely identify with the emes of Avrohom's family.

Hogor had many children with Avrohom. But none of them were able to continue in Avrohom's derech. Soroh has one child with Avrohom, and that child will be the only one to carry on Avrohom's legacy. Why couldn't Hogor manage to raise that kind of child? Because she always remained the Egyptian maidservant. She could never cut herself off totally from her roots in Egypt even after all that time in Avrohom's house. But Rivka was able to say goodbye and permanently sever that connection. That is why she was chosen to be Rivka Imeinu.

Lot's wife couldn't sever that connection to S'dom and she looked back. She still felt connected to her friends and her property, and she couldn't be saved.

What was the difference between Rus and Orpoh? Rus said she is cutting herself off from Moav and identifying completely with Nomi's people. She re-invented herself and her fundamental identity. Orpoh couldn't do that. Lot's wife couldn't do that. Hogor couldn't do that.

The halacha is that for Jews, it is the mother who gives the Jewish identity to the child. Why? Because at the end of the day, it is the mother who brings up her children and gives them their core identity. At the end of this parsha, I always contemplate the complex identity of Hogor. She must have been a tremendous tzadekes to have been chosen. But Hogor remains a pilegesh till the end. Her children remain outside the legacy of Avrohom because she remained with her Egyptian identity.

This is a very deep idea about how people can build their identity. It is part of becoming a mature adult. There are parts of your upbringing that you keep and develop, and there are aspects that you have to part with and leave behind in order to grow to the next stage of development. Otherwise, those old friends and connections will drag you down and stunt your growth.

I grew up among a lot of different kinds of people – mostly non-Jews and very few frum friends. Other friends I had at certain periods in my life, I eventually outgrew and moved on from. Because I wanted to establish a different identity for myself, and those friends didn't share the values that I wanted to foster.

A person needs to be aware of what aspects of his past can be used to grow to the next level, and what aspects are holding him back, and decide to leave those behind.