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## פרשת וירא

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פרק יט פסוק כו

וּתְבַט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאֲחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נֹצֵיב מֶלַח:

רש"י

וַתְּהִי נֹצֵיב מֶלַח. בְּמֶלַח חֲטָאָה וּבְמֶלַח לְקָתָהּ, אָמַר לָהּ, תְּנִי מְעַט מֶלַח לְאוֹרְחִים הַלָּלוּ, אָמְרָה לוֹ, אַף הַמְנַהֵג הָרַע הִזָּה אֶתָּה בָּא לְהַנְהִיג בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה.

מושג

בְּמֶלַח חֲטָאָה וּבְמֶלַח לְקָתָהּ.

### Translation:

With salt she sinned and with salt she was punished.

### Explanation:

Some understand that while the entire city of Sdom was being destroyed with salt and fire, Lot and his wife were spared as the angels held back the wave of destruction from destroying them as well. However, once Lot's wife delayed to look back, or once she looked at the face of the destroying angel the wave of salt caught her as well. The Midrash, which Rashi quotes, understands that her death was a punishment for her sinning by not wanting to provide salt to her guests. She was punished *מדה כנגד מדה*, making her punishment a lesson to all as to the importance of *הכנסת אורחים*.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

Rashi was bothered by why the Torah saw a need to inform us how Lot's wife died. In addition, the term *נציב מלח* reminds us of the word *מצבה* which refers to a monument; something meant to stand as a sign or marker for others to see, hinting to us that her mode of death sought to teach a lasting lesson.

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## NOTES

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According to Rashi, Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt as a punishment. This however is not obvious. In fact, the simplest way to understand Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt is that the entire Sdom was destroyed by salt, as the Pasuk teaches: *גְּפָרִית וּמֶלַח שָׂרְפָה כָּל־אֶרֶץ־הָאֵל... כְּמַהֲפַכַת סֹלֶם* (דברים כט:כב) *וַעֲמָרָה*: (דברים כט:כב) The wave of sulphur and fire that engulfed Sdom threatened to engulf them as well as the מלאך warned them: (פסוק יט) *הַמֶּלֶט עַל נַפְשָׁךְ אֶל תְּבִיט אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאֵל תַּעֲמֹד בְּכָל הַכֹּכַר הַהֵרָה תִּמְלֹט פֶּן תִּפְסַח* (פסוק יז), and as Lot himself feared (פסוק יט) *וַיִּירָא לוֹט*. While the מלאך waited until Lot vacated an area to destroy that specific place (see פסוק כא וכב) any additional delay could not be tolerated. Therefore as soon as Lot's wife delayed by turning back<sup>1</sup> to look<sup>2</sup> she was indeed engulfed by the same wave of destruction that destroyed Sdom as the מלאך had warned earlier<sup>3</sup>.

However, Rashi understands that Lot's wife was turned into salt as a punishment for the sin she committed with salt<sup>4</sup>. Rashi's source for this idea is the *מדרש רבה* (נא:ה) which teaches:

ר' יצחק אמר שחטאה במלח, באותו הלילה שבאו המלאכים אל לוט מה היא עושה הולכת אל כל שכינותיה ואומרת להן תנו לי מלח שיש לנו אורחים והיא מכוונת שיכירו בהן אנשי העיר על כן ותהי נציב מלח.

While the Midrash supports Rashi's explanation that Lot's wife was punished for sinning with salt, the sin mentioned in the Midrash is different from the sin mentioned by Rashi. The Midrash taught that the sin she committed was going around asking all her neighbors for salt for her guests so that they would reveal the presence of the מלאכים and protest. Rashi, however, wrote that her sin was in that she argued with Lot, complaining that the custom of giving salt to guests, (which Lot probably learned from Avrohom) should not be adopted in Sdom. Rashi's source for this sin is found in a different section of the *מדרש רבה* (נד:ד) which teaches:

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<sup>1</sup> Another reason that Lot's wife might have been engulfed by looking back is provided by the Zohar which explains that by turning back she looked into the face of the destroying angel which led to her immediate death. (Rashi (ד"ה ותבט) actually quotes the first part of the Zohar which explains why the Pasuk says that the wife of Lot looked אחריו, behind him, when it should have said אחריה. The Zohar answers that she looked at that which was behind Lot, referring to the destroying angel who followed Lot destroying the areas that he vacated.) :

ותבט אשתו מאחוריו. מאחריה מבעי ליה, רבי יוסי אמר. מבתריה דלוט... ותבט אשתו מאחוריו. וחמת מחבלא. כדין ותהי נציב מלח. דהא בכל זמנא דמחבלא לא חמי אנפוי דבר נש לא מחביל ליה. כיון דאתתיה אהדרת אנפיה לאסתכלא אבתריה. מיד ותהי נציב מלח. (ותבט אשתו מאחוריו. מאחוריה היה צריך לכתוב, רב יוסי אומר מאחורי לוט... ותבט אשתו מאחוריו. וראתה (מלאך) מחבל. ומיד ותהי נציב מלך. שכל זמן שהמחבל לא רואה הפנים של בן אדם אינו מזיק לו. כיון שאשתו הפכה פניה להסתכל מאחוריו מיד ותהי נציב מלח.)

<sup>2</sup> Why Lot's wife decided to look back is unclear. The *תרגום יונתן בן עוזיאל* (see footnote #2 on the Musag *פרשת ויחי* in *בך יברך ישראל*) explains: (ואסתכלת אנתתיה מבתר מלאכא למנדוע מה הוי בסוף ביתה דאיבא: (פרשת ויחי in *בך יברך ישראל*) דהיא הות מבנתהון דסדומאי.. (והסתכלה אשתו מאחורי המלאך לדעת מה היה בסוף בית אביה שהיא היתה מבנות סדום.)

<sup>3</sup> See רמב"ן (פסוק יז מד"ה ואמר רבי אברהם) According to this explanation the wife of Lot is not punished for looking back, rather her death was a natural result of being caught up in the destruction of Sdom. With this explanation we deflect the question of why she would be punished for looking back when the מלאך only told Lot not to look back but did not tell her.

<sup>4</sup> We might ask, according to Rashi why is she first punished now? Why didn't she turn into a pillar of salt when she sinned? Also, why is not giving salt considered a capital offense? The answer is that there are many sins which are not significant enough to warrant immediate punishment, as Hashem gives us time to do תשובה. However, when one is in a dangerous situation and needs special assistance to be saved, these 'smaller' sins are aroused and become the reason special assistance is not given. (For a full discussion of this idea see the Musag *שעת בלא אלא בשעת* (הסכנה (מקץ מב:לח) שאין השמן מקטרג אלא בשעת). Therefore, the sin of Lot's wife may not have warranted such a severe punishment, however once she was placed in a dangerous situation (and by looking back exacerbated the danger), her sin regarding the salt was aroused leading to her punishment.

א"ר יצחק מצות גדולה עמדה על המלח, דהוא אמר לה הב לאלין אכסניא קליל מלח והות אמרה ליה אף הדא סוניתא בישא את בעי מילפא הכא? (אמר רב יצחק ריב גדול היה על המלח, דהוא אמר לה תן לאורחים קצת מלח והיא אמרה לו אף מנהג רע זה אתה רוצה ללמד כאן?)

Rashi thus combined the two sections of the Midrash. He took the idea that she was punished מדה כנגד מדה from the first Midrash, but the specific sin for which she was punished he took from the second Midrash. It is rather perplexing why Rashi did not suffice with the first Midrash alone.<sup>5</sup> This becomes even more perplexing when we take into account that the sin of the first Midrash (revealing to all that guests had arrived and were seeking food and lodging) seems infinitely more severe than the sin of the other Midrash (simply not wanting to adopt a custom of providing salt to guests).

To begin we must ask why Rashi chose to explain the Pasuk through the Midrash and not to use the simpler explanation mentioned above. To this we might answer that the Torah's need to tell us ותהי מלח bothered Rashi. Why was it important for the Torah to tell us how she died? Also the word נציב reminds us of the word מצבה, which is a monument one erects to mark an event for all time, hinting to us that her mode of death sought to teach a lasting lesson. Rashi thus begins his commentary on the Pasuk by telling us ובמלח חטאה ובמלח לקתה; there was a cause and effect that the Torah is trying to highlight.

This cause and effect is known as מדה כנגד מדה; Hashem punishes in direct relation to the sin that was committed. For example, since Pharaoh drowned the Jewish children he too was punished by having his troops drowned, as Moshe says, בדבר אשר זדו עליהם (שמות יח:א). Not only is this true regarding exacting justice but it also demonstrates to all the reason the person is being punished.

Let us return now to the two 'salt' sins of Lot's wife:

A: She went around to all the neighbors asking for salt as a pretense to reveal the fact that guests had come and to arouse the anger of the people of Sdom. She wanted to have the guests thrown out of the city and she concocted this ruse in order to rile up the neighbors.

B: She argued with her husband regarding him wanting to give the guests salt. It is indeed perplexing why it should bother her or why she considers this to be a מנהג רע. We might suggest that salt is used to give the food extra flavor, making the guests meal more enjoyable. Lot's wife was claiming that it is sufficient that we give them food; why do we have to make it taste good as well? This is the מנהג הרע הזה of which she speaks.

It turns out the regarding the first sin, the salt really had nothing to do with the sin. She could have asked for napkins for the guests and received the same reaction. However, in the second sin the salt had everything to do with the sin. Her rejection of this מנהג רע, as she calls it, spoke volumes about her evil character and her attitude regarding הכנסת אורחים. Rashi, who understood that the Torah was teaching us a lesson of מדה כנגד מדה, thus preferred the second sin as the reason Lot's wife was punished as it better illustrates the concept of מדה כנגד מדה.

We have explained the concept of מדה כנגד מדה as a way of describing the type of punishments G-d uses. For example, salt for Lot's wife and water for פרעה. This understanding is found in the גמרא (סנהדרין ז.צ.) which teaches:

הוא כפר בתחיית המתים לפיכך לא יהיה לו חלק בתחיית המתים, שכל מדותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא מדה כנגד מדה. However there is an additional explanation of the concept which is based on a slightly different wording of הו"ל. The (סוטה ה:) teaches the same concept thus: במדה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו, with the measure that you measure you too will be measured. This wording certainly supports our above understanding but allows us to expand it to also mean that according to the way you judge others

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<sup>5</sup> The ת"י indeed explains the Pasuk according to the first Midrash:

ומטול דחטת במלחא בפרסומי עניא הא היא עבידא עמוד דמלח (ומכיון שחטאה במלח בזה שפרסמה שיש עניים נעשתה עמוד מלח).

you too will be judged. If you give others the benefit of the doubt you too will be given the benefit of the doubt. If you are forgiving to others you too will be forgiven<sup>6</sup>.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that the word we use for character traits is מידות, which also means measures, as we see here. The reason might be because we use our character traits as the filter by which we make meaning of our world and of all our interactions with others. A person who is giving will find good in others, a person who is negative will find negativity all around them. Our מידות are thus our מודדים; we use our character traits to measure others. According to this we might give a deeper understanding to this Musag: במידה שאדם מודד, with the character traits you use to interpret your world, מודדים לו, so you will indeed find that measure all around you.

**Questions for Further Thought:**

- a. Where else do we find the concept of מדה כנגד מדה?
- b. Do you think מדה כנגד מדה applies to Hashem rewarding us as well?
- c. Can you think of times when you were rewarded or punished מדה כנגד מדה?
- d. Other than giving them salt, can you think of things that might make guests feel more comfortable or maybe uncomfortable?

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<sup>6</sup> With this we can understand the גמרא (יומא כג.) which teaches כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו, which means if one forgives those who hurt him, he too will be forgiven for all his sins. The word מדותיו does not appear appropriate here. It seems, however, that what the גמרא is referring to when it says מעביר על מדותיו is to one who passes over his 'measurements', meaning he is willing to forgo his judgement of others and forgive what appears to him as hurtful actions. If he is willing to suspend his 'measurements' regarding others then Hashem will do the same for him.