



HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW

Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayera 5781

Dear Parents,

Dealing with change is a significant challenge for most of us. We are creatures of habit, and our sense of security hinges to a large extent on consistency, stability and therefore predictability. Things are OK today, so I'm confident they'll be the same OK tomorrow. This can explain some of the emotional and mental strain the current pandemic is having on us. We're used to our lives following certain predictable patterns. The pandemic is anything but predictable.

The static mindset that things will continue 'normally' "same-old, same-old," and the potentially devastating consequences of such an attitude, are strikingly illustrated in this week's *Parsha*. *Lot* heard from his two guests the dire warning of *Sodom's* destruction and immediately approached his sons-in-law and described the fearsome prediction in an attempt to persuade them to flee the city along with *Lot* and the rest of the family.

The Torah tells us what the reactions of the sons-in-law were – (*Bereishis 19:14*) ...and it was as if a joke in the eyes of his sons-in-law. The *Medrash (Bereishis Rabba (50:9))* elaborates on their reaction. *They said – there are various musical instruments around* (as if to say there's music playing). *Rashi* on the *Medrash* explains their words: *The city is filled with merriment and tranquility, and you say it will be destroyed?*

Our *Rosh HaYeshiva, HaGaon HaRav Alter Chanoch Henach Leibowitz zt'l* pointed out that the sons-in-law did not deny belief in *Hashem* nor were they questioning *Hashem's* ability to destroy *Sodom*. What they could not fathom was such a dramatic turn of events. Everything was peaceful and joyful. Calm and merriment abounded. The city's entertainment district was filled with concerts, theaters, cafes, crowds of revelers. This was about to change? Impossible. To advance the idea that this was about to become undone could only be a joke.

We learn from the *Medrash* that this attitude sealed their fate. It wasn't their attachment to *Sodom's* values or a particular love for the city. They were stuck in the present and were in total disbelief that what would come tomorrow could be very different from today. It wasn't even an inflexible attitude or a rigid character. Their world view took in the present circumstances and could not contemplate a different future.

We can manage with whatever challenges there are at the moment.

So many of us suffer from a similar worldview, or at least we did until recently. Living in the present, caught up in the way people do things now, one can get entrenched, even unconsciously, in contemporary lifestyles and mores and be unable to imagine circumstances ever being different. Our way of interpreting events and people as being the only reality can cause us to mimic the styles and attitudes of the current generation, without applying the proper perspective and analysis to their real value. This is not the Torah approach, and it is not the attitude we want to inculcate within our children. One silver lining of the times we are living through, is that current events are showing us so vividly that life can be unpredictable. Things can and do change abruptly and therefore we need to remember that contemporary life and current values cannot be the ultimate goal of the human experience. Only the eternal values of Torah and connection to *Hashem* are unchanging.

This is especially relevant to helping children cope with adversity, since they live totally in the moment. They don't imagine things being different than they are right now. If someone does something a bit unkind to them, their reaction will be "he hates me" or "she's always so mean." What's happening now is, in the child's mind, the permanent state of affairs.

We have it within us to harness the difficulties we have been experiencing for more than half a year now and use them as a positive force. We can help our children internalize the lesson that the circumstances we find ourselves in right now are not going to be the same forever. Therefore, they need not overwhelm us. We can and we will, with *Hashem's* help, manage with whatever challenges there are at the moment.

Our ultimate focus needs to be that *Hashem* is in charge, He conducts the affairs of mankind for our ultimate good and the best approach to life is to cling to Him and feel and sense His presence in whatever vicissitudes or triumphs we experience. *Hashem* loves us and is watching out for us. By internalizing that perspective, our families and especially the children will be healthier, happier and ultimately more successful.

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Best wishes for enjoying the eternal gift of Shabbos,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann