

Genesis 19:4 / Lot as Resident Alien

<p>ד טָרַם, וַאֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר אָנְשֵׁי סֹדֶם נָסְבוּ עַל-הַבַּיִת, מִנֶּעֶר וְעַד-זָקֵן: כָּל-הָעָם, מִקְצָה.</p>	<p>4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both young and old, <u>all the people</u> from every quarter.</p>
<p>ה וַיִּקְרָאוּ אֶל-לוֹט וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ, אֵיךְ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַלַּיְלָה; הוֹצֵאם אֵלֵינוּ, וְנִדְעָה אֹתָם.</p>	<p>5 And they called unto Lot, and said unto him: 'Where are the men that came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.'</p>
<p>ו וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט, הַפֶּתַח; וְהִדְלֹת, סָגַר אַחֲרָיו.</p>	<p>6 And Lot went out unto them to the door, and shut the door after him.</p>
<p>ז וַיֹּאמֶר: אֶל-נָא אַחֵי, תָּרְעוּ.</p>	<p>7 And he said: 'I pray you, my brethren, do not so wickedly.</p>

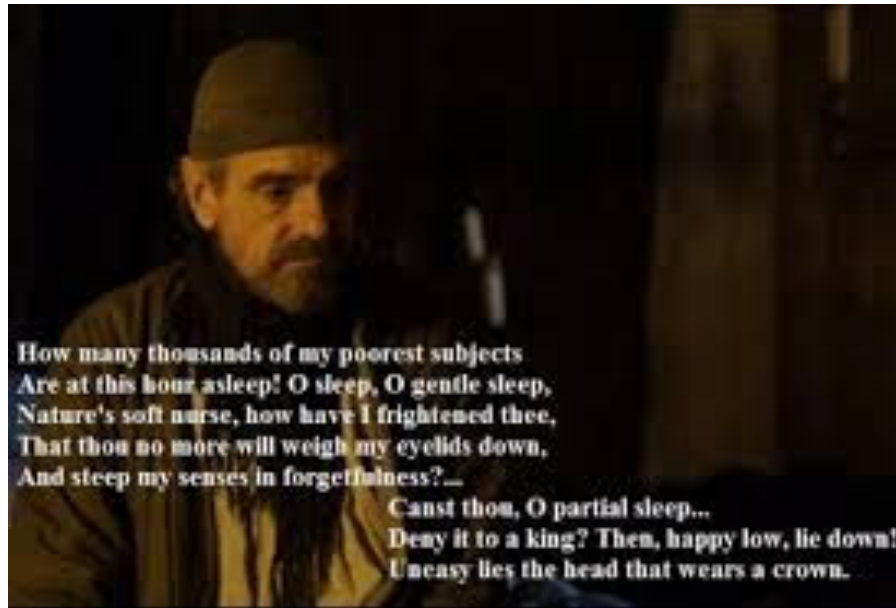
Now, let's pay close attention to their reaction . . .

<p>ט וַיֹּאמְרוּ גַש-הָלֵאָה, וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאָחִי בָּא-לָגוּר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט--עִתָּה, נָרַע לְךָ מֵהֵם; וַיִּפְצְרוּ בְּאִישׁ בְּלוֹט מְאֹד, וַיִּגְשׁוּ לְשִׁבַר הַדָּלֹת.</p>	<p>9 And they said: 'Stand back.' And they said: '<u>This one fellow came in to sojourn</u>, and he will needs play the judge; now will we deal worse with thee, than with them.' And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and drew near to break the door.</p>
<p>י וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת-יָדָם, וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת-לוֹט אֲלֵיהֶם הַבַּיִתָּה; וְאֶת-הַדָּלֹת, סָגְרוּ.</p>	<p>10 But the men put forth their hand, and brought Lot into the house to them, and the door they shut.</p>
<p>יא וְאֶת-הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-פָּתַח הַבַּיִת, הִכּוּ בִּסְבָּנִים, מִקָּטָן, וְעַד-גָּדוֹל; וַיֵּלְאוּ, לְמַצָּא הַפֶּתַח.</p>	<p>11 And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great; so that they wearied themselves to find the door.</p>

Their message is clear -- Lot, while you reside here, you are not 'of here.' You are not one of us. You are an unwelcome resident alien. You will not replace us.

Where have we heard this before? This is not your land, nor your country, although it might have been a place where there were good and bad people on both sides -- apparently there were not.

As we discussed in this past week, with all of Joseph's contributions to both his own people and to the people of Egypt, still there was an uneasiness in the land of the two Egypts (Mitzrayim = two Egypts).



"Uneasy the head upon which sits the crown" -- [Henry IV, Part II, Act III, Scene 1](#)

King Henry:

Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose
To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude,
And in the calmest and most stillest night,
With all appliances and means to boot,
Deny it to a king? Then happy low, lie down!

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

Joseph, as we have seen, is neither consistently Egyptian or Israelite . At times he is an Israelite-in-exile and at other times, he is the *Viceroy*, even going as far as describing himself as the *Father of Egypt*. He dresses like an Egyptian, he styles himself as such, communicates as such and rules like an Egyptian. And yet, towards the end of his life, he forces an oath upon his children to return his bones to the land of his birth, but first he is embalmed in the Egyptian style and mummified as the same. Truthfully, whatever he was or even 'who he was' is of no historical consequence to us as we are not historians. Rather it is our job to concern ourselves with the story that the Torah wishes us to know and then speculate on the way it is presented to us.

Joseph is nothing less than an Egyptian king reflecting the integration of the Israelite people as part and parcel of Egypt, as a new synthesis of the Egyptian people. This is almost a reunification of the lines of Abraham in the sense that both people descend from his line, the Egyptians through Ishmael (not a Moslem, an Egyptian) and the Israelites through Jacob (remember, his renaming as Israel) -- both of these people are given, according to the Torah, 12 tribes -- each possessing the status of being a people descended from Abraham -- each with their own land.

When Joseph 'settles' the Israelites in Egypt, this could have been defined as a family reunification, but it is not a welcome one. Joseph is quick to take advantage of the famine, quickly buying up the livestock, the fields, the grains, and then the very lives of the Egyptians, (except for the Priestly aristocracy of which he is a member). And I cite this Priestly Aristocracy because it appears that the Israelites are settled in with them, intermarry with them, and live in the same area as they do, enjoying the same privileges, at least for a while.

Essentially, they are part and parcel of Egypt -- that is up and until Exodus Chapter 1:8.

ז ובני ישראל, פרו וישרצו וירבו ויעצמו-- במאד מאד; ותמלא הארץ, אתם. {פ}	Ex 1:7 And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. {P}
ח ויקם מלך-חדש, על-מצרים, אשר לא-ידע, את-יוסף.	8 Now there arose a new king over Egypt, <u>who knew not Joseph</u> .
ט ויאמר, אל-עמו: הנה, עם בני ישראל--רב ועצום, ממנו.	9 And he said unto his people: 'Behold, the people of the children of Israel are too many and too mighty for us;
י הבה נתחכמה, לו: פן-ירבה, והיה כי-תקראנה מלחמה ונוסף גם-הוא על-שנאינו, ונלחם-בנו, ועלה מן-הארץ.	10 come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there befalleth us any war, they also join themselves unto our enemies, and fight against us, and get them up out of the land.'
יא ושימו עליו שרי מסים, למען ענתו בסבלתם; ויבו ערי מסכנות, לפרעה-- את-פתם, ואת-רעמסס.	11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Raamses.

Note the way we traditionally read Pharaoh's statement as he is suddenly concerned with an alien people who have just arrived, almost out of nowhere . . . but let us try to read it in a slightly different way.

Let us read it instead as:

Pharaoh: We have been overrun with this people, ensconced and embedded among us: they look like us, they have become a part of us, married into us and enjoy the highest levels of the land they consider as equally theirs.

They are as alien as any people who might try to align with them and against us -- and yet they think and behave as if they were us. So, because they are this type of an alien, we are going to oppress them, dehumanize them, gender infanticide them (genocide them) and thus actively separate them -- from us.

The new Egyptian Pharaoh is now speaking (Ex 1:8) with purpose: Essentially he is saying: We are going to ignore the fact that we were saved by this people and that we made promises to them. We are going to ignore Joseph's contributions (feel free to substitute the American *Chaim Solomon's role in the Founding*) in the crucial moments when we, as a Nation, needed him. We are even going to ignore all earlier administrations that guaranteed them rights (feel free to substitute *Washington's Letter to the Newport Congregation* for the Egyptian Pharaoh's guarantees and promises to Joseph and Israel -- and the various charters guaranteeing freedom of religion as applying to the many variegated Christianities of America -- and not necessarily to the Jews).

In fact, we are going to ignore our guarantees and promises, while our resentments are only going to grow along with their population increase (or at the very least in their visibility).

For an Egyptian administration to forget that they had been saved by the Israelites, made promises to the Israelites to come and live among them, becoming one with Egypt was not an accident or a faulty memory, it was 'a deliberate statement of resentment and separation by force' and a degradation (and thus not by coincidence, the Torah uses the name: "Two Egypts" (i.e. Mitzrayim) when referring to this particular Egypt (Masr).

Any minority community, visible and successfully living among the many peoples of the world must know that the price of living in any land is 'literacy' or more simply put, the ability to be able 'to read the writing on the wall' -- especially at critical moments. We can even learn in our own times, especially when we see dog whistles coming from every corner of government, from top elected officials and from ruling elites, all the way down to the rank and file of those who stormed the Capitol building (note **the 6MWNE and Camp Auschwitz shirts** as clearly indicative of the rank and file, just as reading any hieroglyphs could possibly be).

Welcome



Yes, there are no guarantees, there rarely ever are. Just like the ancient Israelite community in Egypt, the Torah is communicating that as intertwined and as tightly woven as the Israelites were, as contributory as they were, as indistinguishable as they were even among the highest levels of government and religious leadership, still they were considered an alien people in a home they (would temporarily) consider their own. They were, as the Torah would posit it, simply out of place and were unprepared to read the hieroglyphics on the very walls they came to build, first for themselves and then for others.

We will explore this further on Wednesday. This conversation and the insights from the text of the Torah are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago . . .

With my best wishes,

Seth