

# Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter IV: Vaveira (Gen. 18:1–22:24)

### Essay 16. The covenant of salt

“You shall season your every offering of meal with salt; you shall not omit from your meal offering the salt of your covenant with G-d; with all your offerings you must offer salt.”

– Lev. 2:13.

**פסוק** "ותהי נציב מלח". למה נהפכה למלח? לפי שאמר לה לוט תני מעט מלח לאורחים והיא מיאנה ואמרה אף המנהג הרע הזה אתה בא להנהיג במקום הזה. וכן הביאו רש"י עליו השלום בפירשה. ואם המנהג הרע רצה לומר ושל הכנסת אורחים, קשה למה מיאנה דוקא במלח ולא בכל מה שתיקן להם לסעודה.

There is a verse: “Lot’s wife looked back, and she turned into a pillar of salt.”<sup>1</sup> Why did she turn into salt? Because Lot said to her, “Give a bit of salt to the guests.” She refused and said, “Even this bad custom you will introduce into this place?”<sup>2</sup> Rashi, may he rest in peace, similarly brought this on the parasha.<sup>3</sup> If “bad custom” had the meaning of “welcoming guests,” it’s difficult why she specifically refused with regard to salt, and not with regard to everything that she prepared for them for a meal.

וגיש לומר דאיתא בשלחן ערוך ובבבלי אורח חיים (סימן קס"ז סעיף ה') בשם המדרש, שאם יש מלח על השלחן נעשה השלחן מזבח כפרה והמלח מגין על הפורענות, ועוד כשישראל ממתינים זה לזה השטן מקטרג עליהם, וברית מלח מכפר עליהם וכו' עכ"ל.

**It can be said that it’s brought in the Shulchan Aruch<sup>4</sup> and in the Levush HaTechelet,<sup>5</sup> Orach Chaim (siman 167, se’if 5) in the name of the Midrash, that if there is salt on the table,**

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 19:26.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. Rabbah 50:4.

<sup>3</sup> Rashi on Gen. 19:26.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Joseph Karo (1466–1575), author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, a codification of Jewish law following the same four-part structure of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher’s *Arba’ah Turim*, with the *Orach Chayim* being the first part, discussing the laws of prayer, the synagogue, the Sabbath, and holidays. The *Shulchan Aruch* generally follows the Sephardic rulings, though it has been supplemented with commentary by Rabbi Moses Isserles (1530–1572) (“the Rema”) that presents Ashkenazi rulings.

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Mordechai ben Avraham Jaffe (c. 1530–1612) (“the Levush”), author of *Levush Malchut*, a ten-volume codification of Jewish law. One of these volumes, the *Levush HaTechelet*, is a codification of Jewish law for the *Orach*

the table becomes an altar of atonement,<sup>6</sup> and the salt shields against calamities. Also, when Jews wash for a meal and sit down and are waiting for each other to finish washing, they are sitting in silence. As they are not discussing Torah at that point, they are bereft of mitzvot, and the Satan prosecutes them. But the covenant of salt atones for them, etc.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is important to have salt on the table, even if no one will use it.

ואמרו בפרק חלק אנשי סדום לא נתגאו אלא בשביל רוב טובה שהשפיע להם, דכתיב "אֶרֶץ מְמִנָּה יֵצְא־לָהֶם" וכו' "נְתִיב לֹא־יָדְעוּ עֵיט" וכו', שְׁלֹא הָיוּ מְתִירָאִים מִן הַדִּין וּמִן הַמִּזִּיקִים, כְּמוֹ שְׂרוּמֵז "נְתִיב לֹא־יָדְעוּ עֵיט וְלֹא שְׁזָפְתוּ עֵין אִיָּה". וְכִשְׁשָׁמְעָה אִשְׁתּוֹ שֶׁל לֹט שֶׁהִיא רוֹצֶה לְהִנִּיחַ מֶלַח עַל הַשֶּׁלֶחַן, אָמְרָה לוֹ וְהִלֵּא בְּמִקּוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין לְדַאֹג מִן הַפּוֹרְעָנוֹת, וְכִשְׁאָתָה פִתְחִיל לְהִנִּיחַ מֶלַח עַל הַשֶּׁלֶחַן נִרְאָה מִנְהַג רַע, דְּלַעוֹלָם אַל יִפְתַּח אָדָם פִּיו לְשִׁטָּן. אָמְנָם לֹט שֶׁהִיא מְאָמִין לְדַבְּרֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים וְהִיא יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁהַפּוֹרְעָנוֹת מְשַׁמְשֵׁת לְבָא, הִיא רוֹצֶה מֶלַח לְהִגִּין. וְאֶפְשָׁר נָמִי שֶׁמִּחְמַת זֶה בָּא לָהֶם הַפּוֹרְעָנוֹת שֶׁל "גְּפָרִית וּמֶלַח שְׂרָפָה כָּל־אֶרֶץ".

They said in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of tractate Sanhedrin, entitled “All Israel have a portion in the World-to-Come,” that the people of Sodom were only proud of the many favors that affected them, as it is written, “Earth, out of which food grows, is changed below as if into fire. Its rocks are a source of sapphires; it contains gold dust too. No bird of prey knows the path to it; the falcon’s eye has not gazed upon it. The proud beasts have not reached it; the lion has not crossed it.”<sup>8</sup> For they weren’t afraid of Divine punishment and damaging forces, as hinted by the Scripture, “No bird of prey knows the path to it; the falcon’s eye has not gazed upon it.”

When Lot’s wife heard that he wanted to put salt on the table, she said to him, “Isn’t it so that in this place there’s no need to worry about Divine punishment, and when you start to put salt on the table, it appears to be a bad custom, for ‘a person should never open his mouth to Satan [and speculate about potential disasters].’ ”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Lot—who believed the words of the angels and who knew that Divine punishment was coming near, wanted the salt as a shield. It’s also possible that because of this, the Divine punishment came to them as “brimstone and salt burned the whole land.”<sup>10</sup>

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*Chayim* section of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher’s *Arba’ah Turim*. It follows the Ashkenazi tradition, and is more explanatory than the *Shulchan Aruch*.

<sup>6</sup> See also Berachot 55a: “Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elazar both say: As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel’s [transgressions]. Now [that it is destroyed], a person’s table atones for his [transgressions].”

<sup>7</sup> This is also brought in the *Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim* 167 and in the *Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 167:14.

<sup>8</sup> Job 28:5–8.

<sup>9</sup> This is a teaching of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, and it was taught in a *Baraita* in the name of Rabbi Yosei. See Berachot 19a, 60a; Ketubot 8b.

<sup>10</sup> Deut. 29:22.