D'VAR TORAH: PARASHAT VAYERAH

Shabbat Shalom

First, Yashar Koach to Nina on reading from her Parashah and Haftarah so beautifully.

The source of my words are Rabbi Jonathan Sachs in his commentary on Sefer Bereshit.

I want to discuss the Taamei Mikrah, and in particular what's known as the Shalshelet. It's one of the least common taamim, and it looks like a wavy zig-zag, and sounds like : ^&\*(\*&^%^&\*&^%

Rabbi Joseph Ibn Caspi , a medieval French parshan, described the Shalshelet as signifying indecision, or hesitation. It even looks like a long wavy line, unable to make up its mind to go here or there.

In Sefer Breshit there are only three times we find a Shalshelet. The first is in our Parasha: I'll discuss that in a minute.

The second use of the Shalshelet is in Parashat Chayei Sarah, in the story of Abraham's servant, Eliezer. As we know, Avraham doesn't want his son Yitzhak to marry one of the local Caananite girls. He sends Eliezer to the land of his family , to the city of Nahor, to find a wife for Itzhak. When he comes to the well he proposes a test for the young women who come to water their flock: the one who offers me and my camels water, she will be the one for Itzhak. He says:

ויאמר: ה' אלוהי אדוני אברהם הקרה-נא לפני היום, ועשה חסד עם עדוני אברהם""

The Shalshelet is on the word ויאמר. What could be his hesitation? Could it be that he was not sure of the test? Or maybe he had personal interest: after all if the mission failed and he returned without a suitable wife for Itzhak, then he, Eliezer would have claim to Abraham's inheritance. Hence: Shalshelet

The third use of the Shalshelet is in Parashat Vayeshev, in the story of Joseph and Eishet Potiphar. We all know the story: When Potiphar is away and the house is empty, Eishet Potiphar tempts Joseph to lie with her, but Joseph refuses. "\*\*\*\*"

"וימאן ויאמר אל אשת אדוניו הן אדוני לא ידע מה אתי מה בבית וכל אשר אשר יש לו נתן בידי"

The word the Torah uses for Joseph's refusal, וימאן"" has the Shalshelet. So what was behind Joseph's indecision? On the one hand, to lay with Eishet Potifar would mean rejecting his moral upbringing and family tradition, and of course betraying his boss, Potiphar. One the other hand, she was beautiful , available, and willing!! Thus, the Shalshelet.

The first example of the Shalshelet is in our Parashah. It's in the story of Lot and his family (which Itai read so nicely) . Lot has settled in nicely in Sodom: The angels come to warn him about Sodom's imminent destruction and the need to escape quickly. But Lot's family isn't convinced of the danger; they even joke about the warning. The locals even threaten to kill Lot's guests (the angels) but Lot still doesn’t understand. All this causes a delay in the family's escape. Finally, in the morning, even at the last minute, when Lot finally persuades his family to leave, he hesitates: "\*\*\*\*\*"

"ויתמהמה ויחזיקו האנשים בידו וביד אשתו וביד שתי בנותיו בחמלת ה' עליו, ויצאהו וינחהו מחוץ לעיר"

ויתמהמה: with the Shalshelet. Why did he hesitate?

To understand this, we must understand Lot's backround. He chose to leave Abraham up in the hills of Canaan, and take is family down to the fertile land of the Jordan Valley, to the pagan cities of Sodom and Gomorra, and their sinful inhabitants.

He did his best to assimilate: His daughters married local men and he himself became a prominent citizen. He tried to abandon his family's roots and the moral codes of monotheism. But it didn't work. The locals attacked him and his guests, and threatened his family. Lot wanted to be like them, but the more he tried, the more he failed.

Lot's hesitation in deciding between listening to the messengers of monotheism and assimilating into the local pagan culture, is made audible by the Shalshelet.

In many ways, Lot's dilemma is representative of the Jewish People's confrontation with modernity. These days, in Israel and in Chul, Jews are faced with 3 essential alternatives: 1) to abandon Jewish tradition entirely and to assimilate (that's what Lot tried unsuccessfully to do), 2) to isolate ourselves completely from modernity (we all know who I'm talking about) or, to live and participate in the modern world while maintaining our Jewish identity and values. This is clearly the most complicated and challenging option, but I believe it is the right choice.

Nina: you have chosen to celebrate your Bat Mitzvah here in Kehilat Darchei Noam. I know you strongly value and love your Jewish heritage and tradition; at the same time you are a strong believer in feminism. You do not tolerate situations in which the boys can do something and you aren't allowed. Your mother and I completely support you in this. We also know the consequences of disagreeing with you when you feel strongly about something. Our wish (brachah) for you is to continue to engage the modern world and your Jewish heritage with enthusiasm , commitment, and love.

We want to thank Ariella Zeller for helping Nina to learn her קריאה בתורה and her הפטרה: We couldn't have hoped for a better teacher and role model.

We are also thankful to קהילת דרכי נעם for celebrating with us your בת מצוה and

עליה לתורה. This is truly a unique קהילה' who's members are wonderful people committed to תורה and to עם ישראל.

We feel privileged to be counted among you .

Shabbat Shalom