



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

LECH L'CHA

The Rich Man's Worry

Fiddler on the Roof featured the catchy song, "If I Were a Rich Man". We all sang along, because we all had dreams of being rich.

Affluence is still a widespread dream, but most of us will never achieve it.

Even in the Bible it seemed noteworthy that some people were richer than others, Avraham for instance. About him the Torah says, "And Avram was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold" (B'reishit 13:2).

But how does the text say "very rich" in Hebrew? KAVEID M'OD, literally "very heavy".

Possibly this indicates the sheer bulk of his possessions, but it could also be understood metaphorically as telling us, "Avraham's affluence weighed heavily upon him."

The sages say in Pirkei Avot, MARBEH N'CHASIM MARBEH DA'AGA, "The more possessions, the more worries" (Avot 2:7).

One type of rich person constantly obsesses about not losing his or her

wealth, but this is probably not Avraham. His worry is that of the tzadik, for whom money is a challenge and an opportunity... a challenge to use his means wisely, and an opportunity to benefit society as a whole.

Cities with a Bad Name

S'dom and Amora, the epitome of sin and corruption, were once part of a fertile plain, well-watered and with such luxuriant growth that they were a veritable "garden of the Lord" (B'reishit 13-14).

What spoilt them was the vice and godlessness which gave God no choice but to rain down destruction upon them.

Rabbinic commentary piles up criticisms of the way of life that permeated the cities: they were inhospitable towards strangers, they had no concept of justice, the locals did not even trust one another.

But there is also a rabbinic principle: "There is no punishment without admonition" (Sanhedrin 56b). So Avraham tried to get God to delay punishing the cities in the hope that they would recognise their sins and repent, but to little avail.

In time, S'dom and Amora became a byword for Divine chastisement; Amos reports God as rebuking Israel

who failed to learn the lesson of the twin cities - "You were like a brand plucked out of the burning, yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord" (Amos 4:11).

Israel's enemies would be overthrown like S'dom and Amora and will become "a breeding place of nettles, and saltpits, and a desolation for ever" (Tz'faniya 2:9). But in typical Jewish fashion, that is not the end of the story.

According to the Tanchuma (Vayeira 50a), "God destroyed S'dom, but in time to come when He heals Israel He will heal her too." At that time, S'dom and Amora will change their tune and sing songs of justice and righteousness.

It is part of the messianic belief that the world will be mended and sin will be unthinkable.

A lovely dream? We can help it become a reality if we work on ourselves and our neighbourhood and gradually eradicate the causes that delay and obstruct the coming of Mashi'ach. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH