

Amraphel the king of Shinar...waged war with Bera the king of Sodom. The Torah speaks here of two military blocs, two alliances. One bloc consisted of Amraphel king of Shinar, who, according to Chazal, was Nimrod. Nimrod led the entire world against God's kingship—המריד את כל העולם כולו (Eruvin 53a). This bloc is represented by a group of people who were intoxicated by their own material success and technology, the generation of the dispersion. They held that man reigns supreme, and that by applying his mind he can conquer the universe and dethrone the Creator. They were power-crazed, and power intoxicated. Opposing this bloc, there was another, represented by Sodom, which had *dust of gold* (Job 28:6). This bloc represented the human quest for unlimited pleasure. Thus this was a clash not only of two armies, but of two world outlooks. (*Abraham's Journey*, p. 127)

- 12 From previous chapters we already know that Lot was the son of Avraham's brother, and that Lot lived in Sedom. Hence, there must be some reason why these facts are repeated here. Lot was not a native of Sedom. When he first arrived in Sedom, he was known as the son of Avraham's brother. Had he maintained that identity, he would have been spared from captivity. Even though he lived close to the battlefield, as a stranger in the land he could have been spared from Kedorla'omer's revenge. Lot, however, had become a *resident* of Sedom; he had rights of citizenship there, and so he had to suffer along with the others.

Herein lies a warning to the members of Avraham's family, a warning that has been borne out by centuries of Jewish history. One who remains true to his calling and destiny as a Jew will have to make many sacrifices; on the other hand, he will be spared much trouble, for he will be carried upon כנפי השכינה, the wings of the Shechinah.

The ghettos that isolated us worked not only to our disadvantage, but also to our advantage. Those who lived within the ghetto walls were shielded from many evils to which those outside fell victim during the Middle Ages. Jews were not considered good enough to become judges or law-enforcement officials, or to join the retinues of knights. They were not permitted to participate in tournaments, and they took no part in

world affairs. But neither did they have a part in the torturing, slaughtering, strangling or incineration of their fellow men. They were often the victims, but never the victimizers. Their hands were not stained with human blood, and when fate caught up with the emperors and their armies, the Jews remained safe in their ghettos. They should be happy that they were called to the arena of world affairs only now, when the nations of the world are at least trying to act justly and humanely.

People who are wholly absorbed in their material desires do not learn from their experience. Lot should have learned from his experience and henceforth avoided the people of Sedom. Nevertheless, when the final catastrophe struck, Lot was still there in Sedom.

וַיִּרְדְּפֵם עַד חֹבֶה אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁמָאל לְדָמָשֶׁק - and pursued them until Hobah, which is to the left of Damascus. Abraham chased a mighty army with only 318 men. Nachmanides says that the conflict involved much territory, from Hebron to Damascus. It was a drawn-out war of attrition. The episode of the warring kings teaches us that the Jew is often caught in the titanic struggle between two powerful blocs in world history. A Jew can never be an outsider; he is always entangled, against his will, in great events. Second, even though Abraham rejected both of the ideologies reflected by the warring parties—the ideology of pleasure and the ideology of power—he had to side with one of them, because the other had captured Lot. Third, when caught in the whirlwind of history, there is no difference between a loyal Jew and an assimilated Jew, between Abraham and Lot; the Jew is carried like a leaf in the dark autumnal night. Fourth, Abraham must understand that his destiny is one of loneliness. Such is the unfolding of the great drama of Jewish existence. (*Abraham's Journey*, p. 131)