

Still He Delayed • Parshat Vayera

“He who hesitates is lost,” goes the well-known proverb. I heard this as a teenager for the first time and wondered what it meant. I get lost when I don’t know directions. I don’t get lost when I take too long to make a decision. Or do I?

There’s an incredible moment in Parshat Vayera that happens just as the sun is about to rise. It’s the time of day when possibility opens, when another morning is about to unfold and with it, a sense of limitlessness. It’s the moment that explains why he who hesitates is lost. Tentativeness can make us unsure of who we are. Our indecision can make us feel untethered. It is at this liminal hour when Lot was approached by an angel with an important message: he told Lot to save himself and his family from the catastrophe about to plague Sodom and Gemorrah:

As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, “Arise, take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city.” Still he delayed. (Gen. 19:15-16)

Lot ignored the metaphor of the dawn. With doom on the horizon but the glimmer of light that this day could be different for him and those he loved, “still he delayed.” Rashi writes that Lot delayed to save his property, putting money above his life and that of his family. Radak, a medieval French commentator, expands on this reading. In Genesis 19:12, at an earlier stage, the angel permitted Lot to take what he could with him. As time passed, every hour became increasingly consequential. Lot was forced to forego his possessions and leave at dawn

with only the clothing on his back. Hesitation has its costs. Still Lot wasn’t ready.

different. He could have been heir to Abraham and the next leader of a new nation. Instead, he fathered two sons through incest who grew into two nations that were arch enemies of the Jews.