

House of Sages

LOT'S WIFE

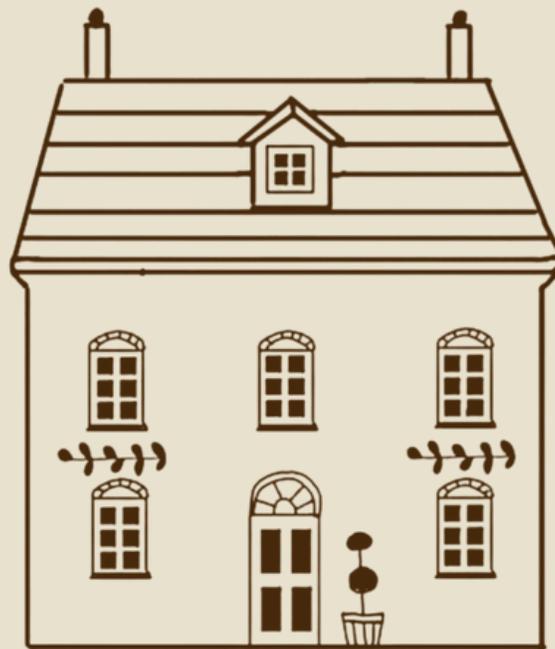
16TH NOVEMBER, 2025

COME & LEARN

וַתִּבֹּט אִשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נְצִיב מֶלַח:

Lot's wife looked back, and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.

Genesis 19:26



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SOURCE 1 – GENESIS 19:17-26

Context: Two messengers warn Lot that God will destroy Sodom for its wickedness. They tell him to flee with his family, and after hesitating, Lot persuades them to let him escape to a nearby small town.

When they had brought them outside, one said, “Flee for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, lest you be swept away.”

וַיְהִי כְּהוֹצִיאֲם אֹתָם הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ
הַמַּלְט עַל־נַפְשְׁךָ אֶל־תִּבְיֵט אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַל־
תַּעֲמֹד בְּכַל־הַכְּכַר הַהָרָה הַמַּלְט פֶּן־
תִּסָּפֵה:

But Lot said to them, “Oh no, my lord!

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹט אֱלֹהִים אֵלֵינָא אֲדֹנָי:

You have been so gracious to your servant, and have already shown me so much kindness in order to save my life; but I cannot flee to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die.

הִנְהִינָא מִצָּא עֲבָדְךָ חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתַּגִּדְלוּ
חֲסִדְךָ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי לְהַחְיֹת אֶת־
נַפְשִׁי וְאַנְכִי לֹא אוֹכַל לְהַמְלִט הַהָרָה פֶּן־
תִּדְבַקְנִי הָרָעָה וּמָתִי:

Look, that town there is near enough to flee to; it is such a little place! Let me flee there—it is such a little place—and let my life be saved.”

הִנְהִינָא הָעִיר הַזֹּאת קְרִבָּה לְנוֹס שָׁמָּה
וְהוּא מִצְעָר אִמְלָטָה נָא שָׁמָּה הֲלֹא
מִצְעָר הוּא וַתְּחִי נַפְשִׁי:

He replied, “Very well, I will grant you this favor too, and I will not annihilate the town of which you have spoken.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנְהִי נְשֹׂאתִי פָנֶיךָ גַם לַדָּבָר
הַזֶּה לְבַלְתִּי הַפְּכִי אֶת־הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ:

Hurry, flee there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there.” Hence the town came to be called Zoar.

מֵהָרַ הַמַּלְט שָׁמָּה כִּי לֹא אוֹכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת
דָּבָר עַד־בָּאָךְ שָׁמָּה עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־
הָעִיר צוּעָר:

As the sun rose upon the earth and Lot entered Zoar,

הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ יָצָא עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְלוֹט בָּא צוּעָרָה:

The Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from The Lord out of heaven—

וְהָ הַמָּטֵיר עַל־סֹדֶם וְעַל־עֹמֹרָה גְפָרִית
וְאֵשׁ מֵאֵת הַמְּרֵה־שָׁמַיִם:

annihilating those cities and the entire Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and the vegetation of the ground.

וַיַּהַפְּרוּ אֶת־הָעָרִים הָאֵל וְאֶת כָּל־הַכְּכַר
וְאֶת כָּל־יֹשְׁבֵי הָעָרִים וְצִמַּח הָאֲדָמָה:

Lot's wife looked back, and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt.

וַתִּבְטַט אֶשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו וַתְּהִי נְצִיב
מֶלַח:

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GUIDING QUESTIONS

As you explore these sources ask yourself the following questions:

- What new elements does the source add?
- Who are the characters in this source and how are they portrayed?
- How do these additions change or affect the original story?

SOURCE 2 – BEREISHIT RABBAH 51:5

4th–5th century, Land of Israel

“*Lot’s wife looked back*” – Rabbi Yitzhak said: This was because she sinned with salt on that night that the angels [messengers] came to Lot. What did she do? She went to all her neighbors and said to them: ‘Give me salt, as we have guests,’ and her intention was that the residents of the city should become aware of them. That is why “she became a pillar of salt.”

וּתְבַט אֶשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו (בראשית יט, כו): רַבִּי יִצְחָק אָמַר שְׁחָטְאָה בְּמֶלַח בְּאוֹתוֹ הַלַּיְלָה שֶׁבָּאוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל לוֹט, מָה הִיא עוֹשֶׂה הוֹלֶכֶת אֶל כָּל שְׁכֵנוֹתֶיהָ וְאוֹמְרַת לָהֶן תְּנוּ לִי מֶלַח שִׁישׁ לָנוּ אוֹרְחִים, וְהִיא מְכַוֶּנֶת שִׁיכִירוֹ בְּהֵן אֲנָשִׁי הָעִיר, עַל כֵּן ... וְתֵהִי נְצִיב מֶלַח.

SOURCE 3 – RASHI

11th century, France

Lot’s wife looked back — she looked back to see what would happen to her daughters, and she stood in yearning (longing).

וּתְבַט אֶשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו — לְרֹאוֹת מָה יִהְיֶה לְבָנוֹתֶיהָ, וְהִתְהַוְּתָה עוֹמְדָה בְּגַעְגּוּעִים

House of Sages

LOT'S WIFE

16TH NOVEMBER, 2025

SOURCE 4 – ZOHAR (VOL. I, 108A–B)

13th century, Spain

“*Lot's wife looked back*” – he asks, Why is it written "from behind him" rather than 'from behind her,' namely, behind the Shechinah. And Rabbi Yosi replies, "from behind him" means from behind Lot, as the Angel of Destruction went behind him. and he asks, How could the Angel of Destruction have followed behind him after sending him away? and he replies, The Angel of Destruction refrained from destroying any place where Lot went. But the Angel of Destruction overthrew the place from which he had departed.

This is why The Angel of Destruction said to him, "Look not behind you," because everything behind you I will destroy. Therefore, it is written, "But his wife looked from behind him," and saw the Angel of Destruction. As a result, "she became a pillar of salt." As long as the Angel of Destruction does not see a person's face, he does not destroy them. But as Lot's wife did turn her face back to look "from behind him," she immediately "became a pillar of salt."

וּתְבַט אֶשְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו, מֵאַחֲרֶיהָ
מִבְּעֵי לַיָּה, אֲלֵא מִבְּתֵר שְׁכִינָתָא, רַ'
יוֹסִי אָמַר, מִבְּתֵרִיהָ דְלוֹט,
דְּמַחְבֵּלָא אֲזִיל אֲבִתְרִיהָ, וְכִי
אֲבִתְרִיהָ אֲזִיל, וְהָא הוּא שְׂדֵר לַיָּה,
אֲלֵא בְּכָל אֲתֵר דְּהוּא אֲזִיל לוֹט,
אֲתַעֲכֵב מִחְבֵּלָא לְחַבְלָא, וְכָל אֲתֵר
דְּאֲזִיל כְּבָר, וְשִׁבִיק לְאַחֲוֵרִיהָ, הָוּה
מִהִפָּךְ לַיָּה מִחְבֵּלָא.

וּבְגִין כֵּן, אָמַר לַיָּה, אֵל תְּבַט
אֲחֵרֶיךָ, דְּהָא אֲנָא אֲחַבֵּל בְּתֵרְךָ,
וְעַל דָּא כְּתִיב, וּתְבַט אֶשְׁתּוֹ
מֵאַחֲרָיו. וְחִמַּת מִחְבֵּלָא, כְּדִין וְתֵהִי
נְצִיב מֶלֶח. דְּהָא בְּכָל זְמַנָּא
דְּמַחְבֵּלָא, לֹא חֲמִי אֲנָפוּי דְּבֵר נֶשׁ,
לֹא מִחְבִּיל לַיָּה, כִּיּוֹן דְּאֲתֵתִיהָ
אֲהֲדֵרֵת אֲנָפָהָא, לְאַסְתַּכְלָא
אֲבִתְרִיהָ, מִיַּד וְתֵהִי נְצִיב מֶלֶח.

SOURCE 5 – RAV SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

19th century, Germany

As she stood still, she was overtaken by
the death that followed on her heels.

Indem sie stille stand, ward sie von dem ihr
auf die Ferse folgenden Tode erreicht

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SOURCE 6 – THE TORAH, A WOMEN'S COMMENTARY

21st century, United States

Lot's wife looked back — This is precisely what Lot is warned against. Nowhere does the text indicate that he passes this information to his wife and daughters. The question remains: Does Lot's wife not know about the warning—or does she look back in spite of it?

and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt — She is reluctant to ignore what happens to those she leaves behind, and this concern costs her life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How do these different readings influence your understanding of Lot's Wife's actions and what she represents?

Many of these sources explore why Lot's wife looks back – what does it mean to “look back” in this story, and what might it symbolize about memory, attachment, or moral responsibility?

Each commentator reshapes the center of the narrative— what do these shifting perspectives reveal about how different generations or traditions interpret human agency, divine justice, and empathy?

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