

This sermon idea can be used in one of three sidrot in, **בראשית** (Genesis) If congregants have a *Chumash* in their hands it can be especially interesting as they move through the text.

וירא Va-Yera--where the text is in Chap. 19; 16

חיי שרה Chaye-Sarah--where the text is in Chap. 24; 12

וישב Vayeshev--where the text is in Chap. 39; 8

In all three of these locations the trop **שלשלת** appears. **שלשלת** with its long up and down progression is used in these contexts to convey' hesitation. The trop certainly conveys that by its length and sound.

But what is the protagonist's hesitation about?

Lot hesitates to leave a Sodom where destruction is about to happen. The word the text uses is "**ויתמהמה**", "Still he delayed", with a **שלשלת** appended to the top of that word.

Abrahams servant, appearing in Nachor after a long journey, not knowing which maiden will be right for his master's son, begins a prayer asking God for a sign, with which to pick the right maiden. The text says "**ויאמר**,"And he said,"...with a **שלשלת** on the word.

Joseph rejects Potiphar's wife's amorous advances with "**וימאן**", "But he refused"- again with a **שלשלת** over the word.

In each of the instances it is clear what needs to be done. Lot needs to get out of Sodom to save his and his remaining families lives; The servant needs to get on with the task of fulfilling his oath to his very elderly master, and Joseph needs to honor his loyalty, both to his master and to his moral commitments.

Yet each hesitates. And the hesitation is marked by a **שלשלת** -a word whose simple meaning is chain.

What were the chains that made these three hesitate?

For Lot, Rashi puts it clearly. He was afraid of losing the assets he had built up over the years. He had settled near Sodom because of its prosperity and he had done well there. He had chosen the area around Sodom, because it was “well watered”...like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt.” He had moved from being a tent dweller near Sodom to being a homeowner inside the city, a prosperous, upwardly mobile young man, well practiced in the arts of negotiation and getting good deals for himself.

Now he has to flee. Yet fearful of what he will lose, he delays. Perhaps the destruction will not happen; perhaps he'll be lucky enough to not lose all he has accumulated, the style to which he has become accustomed. So “As dawn broke, the angels urged Lot on, saying, “Up, take your wife and your two remaining daughters, lest you be swept away because of the iniquity of the city.” Yet he was afraid of losing it all; chained to his possessions hesitates.

For Joseph, the conflict is between his overweening sense of his own power and attractiveness, (see Rashi) and the position he has worked hard to attain. “ And when his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord lent success to everything he undertook, he took a liking to Joseph. He made him his personal attendant and put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, in the house and outside. He left all that he had in Joseph's hands and, with him there, he paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate. Now Joseph was well built and handsome.” When tempted by Potiphar's wife, and after much hesitation refuses, he says disarmingly and truthfully; “Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in this house, and all that he owns he has placed in my hands. He wields no more authority in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife.”-chained to his power-he hesitates

For the servant, (perhaps Eliezer) the hesitation is a bit more difficult to grasp. He is no mere servant. He is in charge of everything in Abraham's house. For a long time it looked as if he might be the heir to it all. He had worked hard and been exceedingly loyal to his master. He had worked his way up. His master is very old, the angel of death just around the corner. Perhaps, in spite of his master having had a child in his old age, there is still a chance. He goes on his mission with some hesitation, raising the issue of the woman not accompanying him, perhaps taking Isaac to Aram Naharaim, having him marry and stay there, he might even like it there, and that might after all, leave things in the servants hands, at least for a while longer, while the doddering old man lives. Yet he is a loyal servant and loyalty to Abraham, even an oath taken to him is one thing, but a man does have to consider his own well-being, and all he has accomplished. He too has a wife and family to

consider. Maybe if there were no wife for Isaac, it would be to his advantage. It might be better if this mission were to fail. How will he know anyway, who the maiden will be? If there is no appropriate maiden, he can return, mission not accomplished, and play for a bit more time. If he finds a wife for the child of his masters old age, he will forfeit rank, position and power, to the new generation, sooner rather than later; chained to his status and prestige- *he hesitates*.

Each hesitates for his own reasons. Each hesitation is marked by a שלשלת, a long back and forth musical form. Each time the melody reaches its end it begins again, linked and repeating what went before. Each שלשלת is literally a chain.

The chains that bind us from doing what we need to do are often linked to our past, to what we have accumulated, the power we have attained, to our perception and valuing of the status and prestige we have achieved. These chains limit us and make us hesitate in doing what we need to do.

One thinks of the refugees in France in 1940 who loaded themselves down with carts and horses, mattresses and bedding piled on top in a vain effort to save all they had, and so clogged the roads that no escape was possible. Those who did not delay, who traveled light, who did not focus on what they were losing, more often succeeded in escaping.

One thinks of our hesitation in doing what we need to do about the environment because it will upset how we are used to living.

One thinks of our position in wanting good things, but not in my back yard.

One thinks of past officers of organizations who concerned with their loss of status and prestige, will not cooperate with the new officeholders.

You can create many further examples.

The Trop teaches. The שלשלת is always there in hesitation. What makes it difficult to do what one must do, what one is obligated to do, what the moral thing is to do, even what may save ones life is the chain whose links are made up of our past accomplishments, acquisitions, power and position. Who we are, the way we have come is a potential chain holding us back from what we might be.