



וִירָא  
Vayeira

# Ashreinu אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion



## The (in)Justice of Sodom

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The Gemara at the end of Sanhedrin spends nearly an entire *daf* describing Sodom. The subject comes up in the context of the gemara describing individuals and groups of people who do not receive a portion in

the world to come, which is the overarching theme of the 11th perek. The following are some of the highlights as to what the judicial system looked like in Sodom. All of these examples are found in Sanhedrin 109:

1. If Tom hit Harry's wife and made her miscarry, Harry must give to her to Tom until she becomes pregnant again.
2. If Tom cut off the ear of Harry's donkey, Harry must give it to Tom until the ear grows back.
3. If Tom wounded Harry, Harry must pay him, for this was (a limited) bloodletting, a procedure that at the time of the gemara was viewed as therapeutic.
4. One who crosses the river in the ferry must pay four

*zuzim*. One who goes through the water by foot must pay eight.

The gemara tells the story of a launderer who once went to Sodom. The people of Sodom demanded four *zuzim* from him. When he said that he went through the water by foot, they demanded eight. He did not pay. They wounded him. He came in front of a judge. He was told to pay for the bloodletting, and also the eight *zuzim*.

The above gemara obviously paints a picture of a warped sense of justice that is emblematic of the people of Sodom. The perverted notion of what is fair so permeated the mindset and culture of Sodom that it made its way into both the judicial and legislative branches of Sodom.

What is the fundamental flaw in their thinking? What led the Sodomites to come to conclusions that are clearly flawed and morally challenging? The mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:10) gives us an insight into this.

The mishna writes:

ארבע מדות באדם האומר שלי שלי ושליך שלך זו  
מדה בינונית ויש אומרים זו מדת סדום

*“There are four character traits in a person... that which is mine is mine and that which is yours is yours, according to one opinion that is an average mentality and according to others that is the character trait of someone from Sodom.”*

It's easy to see and understand the first opinion of the mishna. The mishna is describing a thought process, not much different than the American dream of home-ownership and the rights of the individual. The other position of that mishna seems to be a stretch. How can a position of what basically is the right to ownership and respecting others to own as well be construed as **מדת סדום**?

What we must consider when trying to understand the mishna is: I understand that we can both be owners of different properties, but I exist in a world where I own property with little to no regard for your property. It's an attitude of egocentrism where I am totally absorbed in what I own with no consideration of you and your property. In such an egocentric mindset, my first and chief goal is to maintain and grow my possessions. If this self-centered thought process is the person's starting point, then any time there is a question of litigation, it will always start with an argument that favors me contrary to what would be considered logical or fair.

The Torah wants us to own and take care of ourselves, but the Torah wants us to concurrently take other people in consideration. It's neither easy nor convenient to think of both myself and others, but the Torah demands it. **ואהבת לרעך כמוך** is the Torah's demand of having to think about both of us. The mindset of Sodom not only prevents individuals from making moral and logical decisions, but infects the fabric of the whole culture all the way up to their legal system, which ultimately left our Creator with the decision to end that culture entirely. May Hashem give us the capacity to grow and develop into refined Jews who have the ability to think of both ourselves and others concurrently.

## Gaining from the Loss

Yitzy Lanner ('19)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayeira, Hashem tests Avraham with yet another request, and this test seems

to be the hardest test of them all. Hashem asks Avraham to bring Yitzchak, his only son, as a sacrifice. With no hesitation, Avraham does exactly what Hashem asks him to do. He takes Yitzchak up to Har HaMoriya to fulfill God's command. Just as Avraham is about to cut Yitzchak's throat, Hashem tells Avraham not to sacrifice Yitzchak, and that:

“...כִּי עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי, כִּי-יִרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶתְּהָ...”

*“Now I know that you are a God fearing person” (Bereishit 22:12).*

Why did it take Hashem so many tests and so much time with Avraham in order for Him to realize that Avraham could be considered God-fearing?

The Chatam Sofer gives a beautiful answer to this question. He says that prior to Akeidat Yitzchak, Avraham was living a comfortable life and was being promised many great things from Hashem. However, when Avraham got tested with Akeidat Yitzchak, the situation was a little different. Instead of Avraham being promised great things from Hashem, it seemed like he was only going to lose things during this test. He had to give up his only child and the legacy that he could have possibly had. So only now, after Avraham proves to Hashem that he will listen to Him even if it is not for his benefit, Hashem can see that Avraham is truly a God-fearing person.

We can learn a great lesson from this test given to Avraham. Despite the fact that Avraham only stood to lose things during this test, he still had faith in Hashem and trusted Him, leading him to listen to what Hashem asked of him. We too should listen to Hashem even if we don't see any possible benefit for us. Just like Hashem spared Avraham by not making him sacrifice Yitzchak, so too, Hashem will make sure to spare us of harm and dangers if we listen to His commandments to the best of our abilities.

## Old Habits Die Hard

Yoni Kurtz ('20)

In the first few pesukim of this week's parsha, Parshat Vayeira, Avraham is recuperating from his brit milah. The Rashbam teaches us that Hashem intentionally made it a tortuously hot day so Avraham would not need to host travelers. Nonetheless, Avraham sees three travelers, whom many identify as *malachim* of Hashem,

trekking through the desert. In spite of his immensely distressed state, Avraham welcomes them with open arms in a tremendous showing of *hachnasat orchim*, or hospitality towards guests. We know from various commentaries that Avraham did this on many occasions. He refused to rest until he had not only taken excellent care of his guests, but educated those who passed through his home.

Later in the parsha, the men travel to Sodom to fulfill Hashem's command to destroy the wicked city. They immediately find Lot, Avraham's nephew, sitting by the gate of the city. After a greeting and customary bow, Lot says:

הִנֵּה נָא אֲדֹנָי סוּרוּ נָא אֶל-בֵּית עֲבָדְכֶם וְלִינוּ  
וְרַחְצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁכַּמְתֶּם וְהִלַּכְתֶּם לְדַרְכְּכֶם

*"Behold now my masters, turn aside now to the house of your servants and you will sleep, and you will wash, and you will wake up early and go on your way"* (Bereishit 19:2)

Lot, just like Avraham, invites the men in, even telling them to leave early so as to avoid the evil people of Sodom. The men at first resist but Lot insists on having them. This situation is eerily similar to Avraham's invitation just one perek earlier. Both of them meet travelers and bow to the earth. In Avraham's situation, the pasuk says: "*Vayishtachavu Artza*" - "and he bowed towards the ground" (18:2), and when describing Lot's: "*Vayishtachavu Apayim Artza*" - "and he bowed his face to the ground" (19:1).

Both of them call the men by the same name, *Adoni*, masters, and invite them in. Both instruct the men to wash:

Avraham(18:4) "*Yukach Nah M'at Mayim V'rachatzu Ragleichem*" and Lot (19: 2) "*V'rachatzu ragleichem*"

The similarities continue, with both making bread for the guests. These two situations find two men acting in what at first appears to be two shockingly similar manners. But when one truly considers it, their behaviors make perfect sense. After all, the two men lived together. Avraham, who was chosen by Hashem, loved to do *hachnasat orchim*. He presumably did this mitzvah many times, and his behavior rubbed off on Lot so much that even while living in Sodom, he retained some of Avraham's more admirable qualities.

As many of us get older, we will move away from our roots, from those who educated us and took care of us.

May we all merit to learn from those who are anywhere close to as great as Avraham and be able to remember their valuable lessons even as we adapt to new situations and learn to live independently.

While on the topic of *hachnasat orchim*, I would like to personally thank all of those who have hosted me graciously over the years, including those who did so on my most recent visit to Boca. May we all establish excellent habits in doing mitzvot, and continue to execute the special mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim*.

## Be the Ten

Yarden Rindsberg ('21)

This week's Torah portion is Parshat Vayeira. Parshat Vayeira discusses some of the challenges Hashem gives Avraham to complete. For example, Avraham's self-executed brit milah, Hagar and Yishmael's exile, and Akeidat Yitzchak. But, the focal point of this dvar Torah is a topic people pay much less attention to. It's about the story of Sodom's destruction.

As you might know, Sodom was infamous for its cruel and selfish behavior. The people of Sodom did not like to share their resources with travelers or anybody else other than themselves. As a consequence for the people's evil, Hashem plans to destroy the city and the people in it. Before the destruction, Avraham confronts God. Avraham suggests that if there are even 50 tzadikim living in Sodom, it should not be destroyed. God allows him to search for 50 tzadikim. To no one's surprise, Avraham can't find even 50 tzaddikim in this horrible city.

Avraham lowers his offer to less and less tzadikim every time he asks, and still he can't find enough tzadikim to save the city. He finally asks for Sodom to be spared even if there are just ten tzadikim living in the city. Again, his attempt fails. There is no sign of even ten righteous people in the city of Sodom. So, Avraham has to give up and allow Hashem to destroy the city. Avraham's nephew Lot and his family are rescued from the impending destruction of the city. At last, Hashem burns the city and everyone inside.

What should we learn from Avraham's several fruitless attempts to save this corrupted city of Sodom? Avraham's failed attempts teach us that even just ten tzadikim could have saved an entire city from being destroyed. Even just a few people could have gone against

their city's beliefs and acted kindly to one another, and could have saved their entire population. Therefore, in life we should try to be amongst the "ten righteous people."

Constantly, in our daily lives, people around us are doing bad things, and we can't always stop them. But it is your choice whether to take part in that behavior or not. For example, if you are in a class and your fellow classmates are being wild and disrespectful to the teacher, it doesn't mean you have to follow their behavior. Next time you are in a situation like this remember to be one of the ten.

## Sarah vs. Hagar

Al Dimont ('20)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Vayeira, Sarah tells Avraham to exile Hagar, and Avraham complies. The reason for this is fairly obvious but still begs the question of cruelty. Sarah was upset that Hagar and Avraham had a child together and grew a shared bond over their child that Sarah did not yet have. Even when Sarah did finally have a son, tensions between Sarah and Hagar still grew. This makes Avraham partly to blame for his lack of attention to the troubles brewing between his wives and sons.

In last week's parsha, the Radak (Bereishit 16:6) explains, that Sarah treated Hagar so poorly that she went so far as to torment her and make her work extremely hard. Sarah calls Hagar, "this woman-slave", not even referring to her by name. Hagar is so abused that she runs away. Hagar even says to the *malach*, "I am running away from my mistress Sarah" (16:8). As mentioned before, the reason for this was her jealousy of the attention Avraham gave to Hagar.

Avraham should have known that there would be jealousy between the two wives and should have only married one of them. Even more so, he should have stood up to Sarah when she wanted to exile Hagar. The Radak says that Sarah should not have given Avraham the advice in the first place to marry Hagar, but even so Avraham should have known better. He wanted to have a son so badly that it stopped him from thinking it through. Even Hashem gets upset at what Sarah told Avraham to do. A *malach* comes to Hagar and says, "for the Lord has paid heed to your suffering" (16:1), referring to when Sarah was harsh towards Hagar.

Ultimately, Hashem has pity on Hagar and blesses her with a great nation. As punishment to Avraham and Sarah, this nation in the future will persecute the Jews (Ramban 16:6).

This story teaches us a lesson about kindness and jealousy. Jealousy leads to hatred and hatred is one of the worst *middot*. We also must learn to be kind to one another, even if another person seems to be below us. Sarah made a mistake with thinking she could treat her maid poorly then kick her out. We must learn from this to love and not hate.

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