

G-d's Justice

Some are of the opinion that their perception of justice is absolute. Let us learn from Abraham's inquiry of G-d's judgment of Sodom, that man is wiser to seek G-d's counsel, available in the Torah.

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Vayerah

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And he lifted his eyes and he saw that three men were standing before him. And he saw and he ran from the opening of his tent to greet them. And he bowed towards the ground”. (Bereshit 18:2)

Hashem sends three messengers to Avraham. Rashi refers to these messengers as malachim – angels. He explains that an individual

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The Destruction of Sodom

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students

When G-d advised Abraham of His decision to destroy Sodom, Abraham vigorously tried to prevent the destruction. He seemed to question G-d's judgment and seek some sort of reprieve for the people of Sodom from such an ostensibly harsh verdict. However, when Abraham was commanded to take his beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice for the altar, he attempted to fulfill G-d's will with alacrity. This puzzling contrast can be explained by analyzing G-d's system of justice with respect to mankind.

When a mortal judge sentences a criminal, the severity of the sentence is commensurate with the harshness of the offense. In pragmatic terms, the judgment is seeking to protect society and not benefit the criminal. However, G-d's punishment generally seeks to benefit man, so as to elevate the individual to act upon a

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The Destruction of Sodom

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students

higher moral plane. There are exceptions to this principle, as illustrated by the destruction of Sodom. G-d's decree to destroy Sodom was evidently not the type of judgment intended to benefit them. Rather, it was a determination by G-d that the people of Sodom were no longer deserving existence. The corruption of their lifestyles was without any merit that could justify their continued existence. However, Abraham's great love of his fellow man propelled him to be an advocate on their behalf. Abraham was questioning whether this type of punishment from G-d, clearly detrimental to the people of Sodom, was just. In Genesis chapter 18, verse 25, Abraham questioned "That be far from Thee to do after this manner to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should



be as the wicked; that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth, do justly?" Abraham was questioning the justice in G-d's execution of this detrimental punishment. He was not questioning G-d, but rather trying to comprehend G-d's administration of justice. Could it be that G-d would slay a righteous person together with a wicked person? G-d's punishment of Sodom was obviously not beneficial to man, and Abraham was attempting to comprehend the method in which G-d's justice was being performed.

When Abraham was commanded by G-d to slaughter Isaac, no questions were asked. It

was evident to Abraham that this was a decree from G-d, intended to benefit man. Isaac was not a wicked person, deserving extinction. On the contrary, Abraham realized that this commandment was being executed for the benefit of man. Thus, Abraham could not ask any questions. He realized that it is humanly impossible to comprehend how G-d's action is intended to benefit man. A person cannot question the manner in which a punishment from G-d benefits man. The benefit may be the punishment itself. However, if a judgment is of the kind that is meted out not for the benefit of man, but rather because man no longer

deserves to exist, then a person can try to analyze the implementation of G-d's justice. Abraham, motivated by his great love of his fellow man and his intellectual nature, felt compelled to comprehend G-d's justice in destroying the entire city. However, this cannot be misconstrued as questioning how G-d's actions are just. This is beyond human comprehension.

The destruction of the city of Sodom also led to the rescue of Lot and the attempted effort to rescue his wife. This incident is a vivid example of the unfortunate manner in which people view many of the events recited in the Bible. People are overwhelmed with the miraculous fable-like qualities of these stories, which when learned in their youth, are so appealing. All too often people do not overcome their childhood impressions of the

Torah, and fail to appreciate the insightful teachings of the Torah. An analysis of the story of Lot and his wife can help us learn to value the beauty of the Torah's teachings.

Lot's wife was punished after she looked back at the destruction of the city of Sodom. Genesis chapter 19, verse 26 states, "And his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." To comprehend this punishment, we must also understand what was so terrible about her looking back.

Chazal, the Rabbis, teach us that she was turned into a pillar of salt because G-d's punishment is "measure for measure".

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The Destruction of Sodom

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students

Whenever guests were invited to the house, she didn't give them salt for their food. This is the reason she was turned into a pillar of salt. We must analyze the significance and the relationship between these two factors to appreciate G-d's justice being measure for measure.

The decree was that Sodom and all its citizens must be destroyed. Lot, however, was not truly a citizen of Sodom. The people of Sodom were not hospitable. Lot was. He greeted the angels and extended to them the courtesy of welcomed guests. In fact, Lot felt such compassion for his guests that when the people of Sodom wanted his guests to be handed over to them, Lot refused. His kindness to his guests even extended to his offering his daughters to the people of Sodom in their stead. However, he insisted that no harm be visited upon his guests. Thus Lot was charitable and deserved salvation since in spirit he was not truly a resident of Sodom. His kindness though, seems misplaced. He was kind to his guests at the expense of being promiscuous with his daughters. This seems to be an awkward type of kindness and rather immoral behavior.

However, we must appreciate Lot as an individual. The Torah is telling us about his exploits because he obviously was a worthy individual. He was not simply an eccentric fool, or the Torah would not elaborate the details of his salvation. Lot was a relative of Abraham, and was a member of his household. He learned the importance of kindness from Abraham and was a true *bal chessed*, a charitable person. Lot, though, did not adopt Abraham's concept of kindness. Lot was drawn to Sodom because of his instinctual desires. Genesis chapter 13 at the conclusion of verse 12 states ". . . and pitched his tent towards Sodom." Lot was attracted to the sexual permissiveness that pervaded Sodom. Although Lot espoused the concept of loving

kindness, he had no concept of sexual morality. Therefore, his behavior was understandable. His theory was to treat his guests with the utmost kindness, even if it compromised the sexual integrity of his daughters. This to Lot was completely logical. It was entirely within his framework. However, it evidences that he was completely divorced from any sense of "kedusha" - sanctity. This attests to the fact that Abraham's concept of kindness itself was totally different from Lot's. Kindness for Abraham was based upon his sense of justice. Abraham was the first person to recognize G-d as creator of the universe and possessed a great intellect. His kindness for his fellow man stemmed from his wisdom.

Lot had no philosophical basis for his kindness. It was just emotional goodness based on his sense of being nice. Thus, "kallos rosh", levity, was not inconsistent with his philosophy. He had no concept of sanctity whereby man was to live his life based upon a higher intellectual plane of kedusha. However, Lot was worthy of salvation. He practiced kindness to his fellow man and was not a consummate citizen of Sodom. Therefore, G-d sent the angels to save him from the destruction of Sodom since the decree was directed against the citizens of Sodom..

Lot's wife did not share her husband's value of kindness. The Rabbis tell us that she never gave her guests salt. This is really indicative of her nature. Her withholding salt was just an expression of her emotional state. She was a vicious person who disdained her fellow man. She really did not desire to accommodate guests that visited her house. However, because Lot was a kind person, she had no choice. But she felt compelled to withhold something, not to be totally giving to a fellow human being. Lot's wife was truly a citizen of Sodom. The Rabbis tell us that she partook. She was unable to be happy if another person

was enjoying himself. However, since she was Lot's wife, G-d gave her an opportunity for salvation. If she did not look back at the destruction of Sodom, she would be saved. Lot's wife was very happy in Sodom. She shared the values of its citizens and totally identified with them. However, G-d gave her a chance to express a proper ideology. If she repented and realized her wrongdoings and was capable of emotional kindness towards her fellow man, as was Lot, then she would be spared. If she did not look back at Sodom's destruction, it would reflect that she no longer identified with that evil society, and thus, was worthy of salvation. However, she looked back. She still identified with the people of Sodom and felt badly that they were being destroyed. Therefore, her fate was sealed. She was destined to turn into a pillar salt. This reflected the salt that she was unable to share with her fellow man. Thus, G-d's method of punishment is measure for measure.

Abraham also returned to the site of the destruction the following morning. Abraham also desired to look upon the destruction of Sodom. However, his looking was different than Lot's wife. Genesis chapter 19, verse 28 states, "Vayashkaf.....", Abraham looked, he investigated. "Vayashkaf" indicates not merely looking, but rather viewing with an intellectual curiosity. Abraham had no identification with the people of Sodom. He came to view the destruction after its conclusion the following morning. His looking was the viewing of a wise individual who wanted to observe the manifestation of G-d's justice. The Torah is contrasting the method in which an emotional person views the event, to the observation of one who is perfected. The former looks with a sense of despair, yearning, and commiseration. But one such as Abraham, looked to investigate, to comprehend, and to analyze the manner in which G-d's justice works. ▣

Prayer - The Shemoneh Essray

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Today, we do not sacrifice, as there is no Temple in which to sacrifice. Without Temple, G-d cannot be properly designated as the Recipient of our offerings. Without Temple, human emotions run misguided, and are often attracted to idolatrous modes of worship. The institution of the Temple, with its hundreds of laws governing all services, served to direct each of man's thoughts and actions towards the proper worship of G-d. If even one of the Temple laws went unfulfilled, man's nature is enabled to seep into areas, other than Torah law. This is very dangerous, as the religious emotion - heightened to its zenith during temple service - is at risk of following idolatrous emotions, as opposed to G-d's Temple laws. When the Temple existed, its laws directed man's actions and thoughts to fall perfectly in line with correct ideas of the Creator, and His true worship. Without Temple, there cannot be sacrifice. The Talmud cites an instance (metaphorically) where the idolatrous emotion emerged from the Holy of Holies as a fiery lion. This teaches that the idolatrous emotion is as brazen as fire, as strong as a lion, and is intimately connected to the most religious of all areas - the Holy of Holies in the Temple. If you recall, we discussed that according to one view, the Temple was instituted only as a response to the Golden Calf. Temple is a means to address the idolatrous element in man.

With no Temple, our prayers (the Shemoneh Essray) take the place of sacrifice. "Uh-nishalma parim sifasaynu", "...and we will pay for oxen, (with) our lips". (Hosea, 14:3) This means according to the Targum, that "the words of our lips should be received before G-d as pleasant, oxen sacrifices". Our prayers today take the place of sacrifice. What is sacrifice, and how

do our verbal prayers meet the same requirement, that they are a replacements for sacrifice?

Talmud Berachos 26b states that according to Rabbi Yosi ben Rabbi Chanina, Abraham instituted the morning prayer service, Isaac instituted the afternoon's service, and Jacob, the evening service. Modeling prayer after our forefathers, prayer is therefore to be recited three times daily; morning, afternoon and evening. Berachos 29b also derives prayer times of sunrise and sunset from Psalms 72:5, "They should fear you with the sun, and before the moon in all generations." Prayer is therefore defined as a "fearing of G-d". As such, prayer is properly aligned with the solar events of sunrise and sunset. Witnessing such heavenly phenomena, we stand in awe of G-d's might as the sole Creator, and this state of awe is complimentary to prayer, which is essentially "praise" of G-d. Although we ask our requests in prayer, the initial three praises form the essential element of prayer - praising G-d. Aligning our prayers with evidence of G-d's might (sunrise and sunset) we thereby compliment our praises of G-d.

We also learn from Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi that our prayers parallel the morning and afternoon sacrifices, and the burning of the animal sections which endured all evening. We are confronted with a few powerful questions:

1) From where is prayer derived? Are prayers derived from the sacrifices offered each day, or from our forefather's prayers?

2) Why didn't all three forefathers pray at all three intervals each day?

3) If the forefathers themselves offered sacrifice, how can we suggest that prayer is 'in place' of sacrifice? They performed both!

4) What is significant to prayer, and to sacrifice, that both must

performed at these times?

The most primary concept in sacrifice is that we kill a living being in our approach to G-d. We are saying in other words, that we sacrifice 'ourselves' - by proxy. The animal is in our place. We wish to show that our very lives are for no other purpose than to serve G-d. Sacrificing a living being, we express our own wish for self-sacrifice in G-d's worship. For this reason, Abraham and all the forefathers sacrificed, even before the Torah's command existed. Adam, Cain, Abel, Noah also sacrificed. This institution of sacrifice is not Torah-dependent, but an integral, human expression of man's approach to G-d. But sacrifice does not include one element which man requires in relating to G-d; dialogue. This is where prayer comes in. As G-d is our Maker, Provider, and the "All Knowing", man praises, requests from, and thanks G-d. These comprise the three components of prayer. This is predicated on the very fundamental that G-d relates to man. G-d is real to one who prays properly - he recognizes G-d is aware of all, and that man may relate to G-d.

We asked earlier, "Why didn't all three forefathers pray at all three intervals each day?" I do not know that they didn't. All we learn from Rabbi Yosi ben Rabbi Chanina is that the 'institution' of each prayer was formulated by each of the forefathers. However, this does not mean that each one did not partake of prayer at various times, each day. We must then ask, "What is the significance is of the Talmud's teaching, that each one instituted a different prayer?" When reading the Otzar Tefilos on the daily morning, Shemoneh Essray prayer, he cites the Kuzari. The Kuzari makes reference to the famous question on the formulation: "G-d of Abraham,

G-d of Isaac, and G-d of Jacob". Instead, it could be formulated as: "G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." The latter more efficiently describes the idea. However, as the Kuzari mentions, with the latter formulation, we lose a fundamental concept; that each forefather acknowledged G-d as a result of his own investigation. Isaac didn't simply worship Abraham's G-d, nor did Jacob. But each of the forefathers (although taught by his father) came to recognize the truth of the Creator's existence and providence through his own thinking. Thus, G-d's name is associated with each forefather, individually, not collectively. Each one - individually, through his own thinking - arrived at the conclusion that G-d exists. This being so, why must we mention this at the commencement of prayer? It is clear; prayer is an act of attesting to truth. Simple recitation of the words is meaningless. Unless we arrive at the truth of G-d's existence and providence through our own thinking - as the forefathers did - we are not verbalizing an idea which we feel is true. Enunciating truth, means, by definition, that we agree wholeheartedly with that truth, and to do so, we must arrive at that truth through our own thinking, resulting in honest conviction.

We learn that prayer is to be an expression of one's conviction in the existence of G-d. G-d is the One to be praised - the primary focus of prayer. And due to our recognition of His might, we request our needs from Him alone. We then offer thanks for His kindness, as the conclusion of prayer. The fact that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says that prayers are in place of sacrifice, means that the "law" to pray satisfies our requirement of sacrifice, in some manner. He does not argue the fact that the forefathers prayed. His statement

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Shemoneh Essray

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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addresses a different point; the post-Sinai law of prayer. Once the Temple was no longer, the Rabbis formulated the very prayers - already recited in some form - as satisfying some aspect of sacrifice.

Prayer, as an institution, originated with our forefathers. It is an act integral to man's relationship with G-d, which predates Sinai - our acceptance of a system of law. But the 'law' to pray must be post-Sinai, by definition. Maimonides states this law is derived from "And you shall worship Hash-m your G-d..." (Exod. 23:25) This obligatory prayer, was formulated to comply with the times of sacrifice. Maimonides, in his Mishneh Torah, omits any mention of the forefathers in his section on prayer. He too would agree that the forefathers prayed, but again, the law to pray is derived from this verse above and formulated in line with the times of sacrifice. Prayer as a law was not derived from the forefather's actions, which were prior to our Law. However, this does not mean that we cannot model our prayers in some manner after them. This appears to be the position of Rabbi Yosi ben Rabbi Chanina.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob prayed at morning, afternoon and night respectively. We do not derive our prayers from these general times, but from the specific hours delineated by the sacrifices in the Temple.

What we may derive from the forefather's prayer times is this; no portion of the day may be experienced without prayer. Morning, afternoon and evening, are all recognized times zones. Man relates to his day through periods of time, but not necessarily by the hour. Thus, 10:00 and 11:00 are virtually the same in man's experience. But morning is a much different experience than afternoon,

and this is certainly true about our experience of night. "One must relieve himself at night as he does in the day." This shows that man is more modest during the light hours, as he can be seen more readily. At night, man's instincts swell, assisted by the cover of darkness. As man turns his attentions towards different activities as the day changes, and various emotions swell with the day's progress and the setting of the sun, man must regroup and make certain his experiential and internal changes do not divert his attention from G-d. This was taught by the forefathers' various times of prayer. G-d was not absent from their thoughts during any period of the day. And as we said, each one deserved to have G-d's name associated with him individually, as each one came to recognize G-d, not through habit, not through inheritance, but through earnest study and conviction on their own. □

Angels Receiving Punishment

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I just read your essay on Angels, but I still don't understand. Do angels have free will? (Non-Jews say yes). What are archangels?

Mesora: I will explain angel's will below, but Archangels are not a true phenomenon.

Reader: Once Hashem creates an angel for a specific purpose, is it destroyed when its mission is completed?

Mesora: You could say so, when referring to "angel" as a natural force. One could term the cessation of such a force (a completed

mission) as a "destroyed" angel. A better description is, that it was created for a specific time frame, not to exceed that time. So its "life" was destined from the outset. G-d did not discover something new, realized it is no longer needed, and then destroyed it.

Reader: If your answer to the question of angels having free will is negative, how about the "fallen angels" of Genesis 6:2. What are they?

Mesora: I am not certain about free will. The Torah does seem to depict angels as having will, as the Torah discusses Lot and Abraham talking with them, and they respond. One is even punished as he ascribed the miraculous phenomena of overturning the city to himself, and not to G-d. The Rabbis wrote that statement to teach a problem with ascribing miracles to anything but G-d. I would explain the two Rashis (Gen. 19:22) as teaching us exactly that:

(Gen. 19:22) "(The angel said to Lot) Hurry, escape there, for cannot do anything (destroy Sodom) until you come there..."

Rashi 1: "This is the punishment of the angels, on account that they said "for we are destroying (Sodom)", and they ascribed the matter (destroying Sodom) to themselves. Therefore, they did not move from there until they righted, and they said the matter was not under their control."

Rashi 2: "...for two angles are not sent for one mission".

What does Rashi 1 teach? The angels didn't truly talk, ascribing phenomena to themselves. However, the Rabbis have license to write these medrashim - stories - teaching us fundamentals. Perhaps here, the Rabbis desired to teach a new lesson; that G-d alone caused the destruction of Sodom.

Somehow, there was room for misunderstanding the cause of Sodom's destruction. An angel - a "force of nature", like fire - will sometimes appear as a purely natural event. But as Rashi said, the punishment of that angel was that "it didn't move from that place until it admitted that it had no ability of its own to perform the destruction". The angel - the destructive force

that overturned Sodom - didn't necessarily talk. When the angels said, "we are destroying Sodom", this means that the force of nature causing the destruction, seemed natural. It appeared to "claim sole responsibility" for Sodom's destruction, with no will of G-d. Therefore, its appearance required correction, in some manner. There was something about what took place in Sodom, that onlookers might ascribe a natural disaster to Sodom, thereby forfeiting the lesson that it was in reality, a divine punishment. Hence, no deterrent for future generations would exist. Angels, or natural forces, can only function by the will of G-d, and not independently. The destructive appearance somehow had to be altered so a warning to others would have the desired effect. The fact that the angels "remained until they corrected themselves", means that within this disaster ordained by G-d, there was some element which clearly indicated that it was of divine origin. What that was, I do not know, but it was part of the disastrous process, as it was the angels - these forces - which also corrected the previous error.

The next Rashi says "two angles are not sent for one mission". This means that angels are forces of nature, as such, have specific properties. Therefore, water cannot burn, and fire cannot moisten. Each having its own properties, each has a "singular mission".

We see from these medrashim that the Rabbis desired to teach us insight into the truth of things, but did so in a manner that only those intellectually prepared will understand them. Someone of infantile thinking will at the least, remember these amazing stories due to their startling, manifest content for a future time when ready to interpret them.

Regarding your last question, Rashi says "bnay elohim" are not 'fallen angels', but a term denoting sons of officers, people in high position. Perhaps this verse attests to the seeds of error of the generation of the flood which ensued. Those seeds of error were egoistic drives, stemming from their high positions in government. □

Abraham Learning G-d's Justice

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

How did Avraham know what G-d's justice was, prior to G - d ' s communication with him? As he had no Torah, or any communication with G-d as of yet, by what means did Avraham arrive at a true understanding of G-d's will? G-d said "hamichaseh ani mayAvraham....." , "will I keep hidden from Avraham...?" What knowledge was Avraham bereft of, why couldn't he acquire this knowledge on his own, and what was it in G-d's words which introduced Avraham to new concepts?



Without the Torah, Avraham first posited that there is a Cause for all existences. The sciences which relentlessly guide matter were all too well organized - catering precisely to the world's daily needs - that it should exist without a Designer. There is a G-d. One initial Cause. Monotheism.

Avraham saw man as part of creation. He concluded; man is not merely to live his life without self guidance, drifting aimlessly with no goal in life. The existence of man's mark of distinction - his mind - taught Avraham that the Creator desired man to engage this very faculty. It was given only to man, and thus, it must be G-d's will that the mind is to be used by man, above all other faculties. Avraham therefore thought into all matters. Essentially, Avraham thought, "How does this Creator desire I live my life?"

Avraham understood that the primary acknowledgement of man's thinking must be his complete understanding and embrace of monotheism. To this end, Avraham debated with many individuals and proved - through rational arguments - that ditheism and atheism are false

notions.

Once Avraham understood the pursuit of wisdom as G-d's wish for man, Avraham pondered many aspects of the world. They included natural law, philosophy, and laws of government. Avraham thought, as G-d desires many men to populate the world, and all men have the goal of learning, all mankind must work together to ensure a safe haven geared towards that goal of obtaining wisdom. Therefore, moral codes must be followed, i.e., man must ensure another's pursuit of

the good.

As Avraham proceeded to teach his neighbors, G-d desired that Avraham have the correct ideas. Avraham was able to understand a great amount on his own, but many ideas would go unrealized without Divine intervention.

This brings us to G-d's statement, "will I keep hidden from Avraham..." G-d therefore introduced some new idea to Avraham. But what was it? G-d spoke very few words. He said, (Gen. 18:20):

"The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I (G-d) will go down and see if in accordance with their cry they do, and I will destroy them, or not, I will know."

In these words alone was a new lesson to Avraham. (It is essential when learning to isolate wherein lies the answer.) Upon hearing this prophecy from G-d, Avraham thought, "G-d knows whether they deserve to be destroyed, He knows all, so he knows their sin. However, G-d is saying that there are two possibilities here, destroying Sodom, or sparing them. Avraham then responded:

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Abraham Learning G-d's Justice

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

"Will you wipe out these cities if there are 50 righteous souls there? It is mundane that You should kill a righteous person with a wicked, and the righteous will suffer the same as the wicked, the Judge of the entire world won't do justice?!" G-d then responds, "If find 50 righteous in the midst of the city, I will spare the entire place for their sake".

What did Avraham ask, and what did G-d respond?

Avraham made a few statements, but one was not a question. When Avraham said:

"It is mundane that You should kill a righteous person with a wicked, and the righteous will suffer the same as the wicked, the Judge of the entire world won't do justice?!",

He was not asking, but rather, he was stating, "this is not how You work". Avraham repeats the concept of justice in that passage, teaching us that he was only talking about justice in the statement. Avraham had no question on this, a righteous person should live, and a wicked person should die. Justice demands this. What Avraham was asking on was "tzedaka", charity, i.e., whether G-d would save ALL the wicked if enough righteous people were present in the city. And this is precisely what G-d answered Avraham:

"If find 50 righteous in the midst of the city, I will spare the entire place for their sake".

The question is, from where did Avraham obtain this idea, that G-d would not only work with justice, but He would engage traits over and above pure justice, something we would call charity, or tzedaka?

Avraham realized this idea from G-d's few words, "I (G-d) will go down and see if in accordance with their cry they do, and I will destroy them, or not,...". G-d said there was an option here, meaning, although G-d knew Sodom and Amora were sinful, and He knew the exact measure of their sin, nonetheless, there was an option regarding their fate. Avraham deduced from G-d's words that there are criteria, other than the sinners' own flaws, which G-d views to evaluate the sinners' fate. This is precisely what G-d intended Avraham to learn. This is not something a person can determine from his studies. And since Avraham was to be a "mighty nation", and that he was going to "teach his household to keep the ways of G-d", (Gen. 18:18-19) Avraham needed to be instructed in those ways. (Note: Here we see G-d teaches man through engaging man's mind, and not simply spelling out the idea. G-d made Avraham use his reasoning to learn the concept.)

What does is this idea, that G-d will spare even the wicked, provided righteous people are present? I believe it teaches us that G-d will tolerate the wicked, provided there are proper influences with the potential to change the wicked. In such a case, the wicked are not doomed to a failed existence, not yet, provided a possible cure is close at hand. This teaches us the extent to which G-d endures sinners. "G-d does not seek the death

of the sinner, but in his return from his ways...."

We also see earlier that G-d has the consideration that Avraham should know both charity and justice, (Gen. 18:19) "...and he will keep to G-d's ways to do charity and justice...".

What is the difference between charity and justice, and why is charity so essential, that G-d made certain Avraham possess this concept? Justice, we understand, is necessary for any society to operate. Deterrents must exist to prevent people from outletting their aggression and destroying society. Where does tzedaka come in? I believe tzedaka is necessary for the individual, as opposed to justice, which is for the society. With justice alone, if their is injustice, it must be corrected so a society may continue. But what if a person has endured a tortured existence, now facing penalties from a justice system which treats him equal to all others, with no consideration for the unique side effects affecting him, resultant from straight justice? Won't this person have the potential to break at some point? He may even commit suicide. Without tzedaka, charity, one may feel that his specific situation is not recognized. Feelings of persecution and victimization may lead him to self destruction.

It is man's nature when things go bad, to close in on himself, feeling that a streak of misery is upon him. This feeling strips him from all hope. He eventually feels alienated from society at large which seems to be 'doing fine', and the "why me" attitude sets in. He begins a downward spiral. Without another person showing him pity, and a desire to assist, he is doomed.

This is where I feel tzedaka plays a vital role in society. If we are to ensure the well being of society with the aforementioned goal of securing mankind's haven for intellectual pursuits, we need to recognize more than justice. We must also recognize that man needs individual attention in the form of sympathy, empathy, care, hospitality, generosity, and all other forms. The fortunate among us must also initiate such care, and not wait until the fallen person calls out, for it might be too late, and he never calls out, but ends matters drastically. For this reason, the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) teaches, that giving tzedaka is not simply giving money. We are obligated to commiserate with the unfortunate soul. The uplifting of his countenance is the goal, and money is only one item through which we accomplish this goal.

Maimonides states that the highest level of man is when he is concerned with his fellow man.

Man's nature is that he needs to be recognized as an individual, by another. Without this recognition, man feels no integrity, and will not move on with his life. Therefore, tzedaka is essential to a society's laws. Justice and charity must go hand in hand.

Justice serves the society, charity addresses the individual. Both are essential. □

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Parashas Vayerah

RABBI BERNARD FOX

malach – angel – can only have a single mission. Each of these malachim has a unique assignment. In this instance, one was assigned the responsibility of healing Avraham from his recent milah – circumcision. Another was to tell Avraham that Sara would soon bare him a son – Yitzchak. A third malach would tell Avraham of the coming destruction of Sedom.

After fulfilling his responsibility, the angel that foretold the birth of Yitzchak left Avraham and the others. His job was done. The remaining two messengers proceeded to Sedom. The one who told Avraham of the fate of Sedom would now destroy the city. The other angel would rescue Lote.

Rashi acknowledges that this second angel's responsibility presents a problem. An individual angel can only be assigned a single mission. This second angel seems to have performed two tasks. He fulfilled his first mission in the presence of Avraham. He would now execute a second responsibility. He would save Lote.

Rashi responds that this second angel was the messenger that had previously healed Avraham. He further explains that this does not violate the principle of assigning a single task to an individual angel. Both tasks involve salvation. Because of this common feature, a single angel could perform both tasks.[1]

Rashi's comments present two problems. First, he never seems to answer his question. He concludes that one angel did perform two tasks. Rashi argues that because these two tasks are related, the

question is somehow answered. However, the relationship seems rather artificial. Rashi describes both missions as acts of salvation. The rescue of Lote was a true act of salvation. However, the healing of Avraham was an act of salvation in only a figurative sense. Avraham was saved from additional physical pain.

Second, why does Rashi insist that the dual responsibility fell to angel that healed Avraham? There is another candidate for two tasks. This is the angel that foretold Yitzchak's birth. Why could this angel not be assigned the task of saving Yitzchak? It seems that these two responsibilities could also be characterized under the general heading of salvation. We know that Avraham was deeply concerned with having children. This angel relieved Avraham of this anxiety. This is also a form of salvation.

In order to answer these questions, we must understand Rashi's comments at a deeper level. We need to explain the Rashi's basic principle. An individual angel can have only a single responsibility.

It seems that Rashi maintains that each angel or messenger represents a different theme within Divine providence. Each expresses a unique objective. The various themes are identified by associating each with a different messenger. This understanding of Rashi's principle suggests an approach to answering our questions. Apparently, Rashi maintains that the healing of Avraham and the saving of Lote are manifestations of a single theme within providence. In order to understand the relationship

between these two tasks, we must identify the themes represented by the angels.

One theme is easy to identify. Providence is sometimes an expression of Divine justice. This theme is represented by the malach that destroyed Sedom. The other two themes are more difficult to differentiate. The remaining two angels seem to have had similar objectives. They were expressions of the Almighty's kindness to Avraham. One healed Avraham the other foretold Yitzchak's birth. What are the different themes these malachim represent?

Rashi explains earlier that the world was created with a specific objective. The Almighty wished to create a world that would embody and give expression to the Torah.[2] Avraham was chosen to be the progenitor of the nation that would receive the Torah. He served as the instrument for the fulfillment of the Creator's plan. Granting a child to Avraham, was an expression of the Divine plan to create a sacred nation. We can now identify the theme represented by the angel that foretold Yitzchak's birth. He was an expression of the Divine design to create of world embodying Torah.

The theme represented the angel that healed Avraham can now be distinguished. This malach represents the providence that Hashem grants the righteous. The healing of Avraham was not an expression of Divine justice. It was not part of the Almighty's design for His world. This healing was simply a kindness performed for the righteous.

It is now clear that the malach that

healed Avraham was the appropriate angel to save Lote. Lote's salvation was also an act of kindness performed on behalf of Avraham. It is appropriate that the healing angel should perform this task. He represents the theme of the Almighty's providence over the righteous.

“And he hesitated. And the men seized him, his wife and his two daughters because of the compassion of Hashem for him. And they left him outside of the city.” (Beresheit 19:16)

The melachim reveal to Lote their mission. They urge him to gather his family and flee Sedom. Lote hesitates. The melachim seize Lote, his wife and daughters. They deposit them outside of Sedom.

The general impression created by the messenger's urgency is that they had limited control over the destruction destined for Sedom. Therefore, they insisted that Lote act quickly. The melachim could not delay the unfolding events.

This explains an odd event earlier in the parasha. In the beginning of the parasha these messengers, accompanied by a third messenger, visit Avraham. Avraham and Sara are told that they will have a son Yitzchak. The melachim then leave Avraham's home. He accompanies them. The messengers gaze upon Sedom. Suddenly, Avraham has a prophecy. The Almighty reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sedom. This leads into an involved discussion in which Avraham beseeches Hashem to spare Sedom.

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Parashas Vayerah

RABBI BERNARD FOX

Rabbaynu Nissim asks an interesting question. Avraham received this prophecy while standing on the road. Hashem did not wait for Avraham to return home. Why did this prophecy come to Avraham at this odd location?

Rabbaynu Nissim provides a response based upon a teaching of the Sages quoted by Rashi. The Torah tells us that the messengers looked out upon Sedom. The term used is vayashkifu. Rashi explains that this term means to look out. However, it has a specific implication. It implies a negative outcome. In the context of our pasuk, the gaze of the melachim, upon Sedom, indicates impending disaster.

What is the connection between the gaze of the messengers and destruction of Sedom? Rabbaynu Nissim explains that the gaze is not merely a harbinger foretelling disaster. It is the initiation of the destruction. In other words, through looking out upon Sedom the destruction was initiated.

This explains Avraham's sudden prophecy. The process leading to

Sedom's destruction was initiated the moment the messengers looked upon the city. The Almighty wished to provide Avraham an opportunity to appeal for mercy. Little time remained for Avraham to act. Therefore, Hashem spoke to Avraham immediately after the messengers initiated the destruction of Sedom.[3]

We can now explain the haste of the melachim to evacuate Lote. How did their gaze initiate the destruction of the city? It seems that Sedom was not destroyed through a sudden, completely unnatural cataclysm. The destruction of Sedom was brought about through a manipulation of nature. Once the causes precipitating this cataclysm were initiated, they preceded in a chain of natural cause and effect to their inevitable end. This manipulation of nature began with the messengers looking upon Sedom. Once this manipulation was initiated, the messengers had limited ability to alter or delay the outcome. This explains their urgency in dealing with Lote. Sedom's destiny was decided and inevitable. It was

crucial for Lote to escape before the destruction befell the city.

“And Avraham rebuked Avimelech over the well that his servants had stolen”. (Bereshit 21:25)

Avimelech the king of Gerar comes to Avraham. He wishes to establish a covenant with Avraham. Avimelech has seen that Avraham enjoys the providence of the Almighty. He wants to be sure that his descendants and Avraham's will live in peace.

Avraham agrees to the covenant. Suddenly, Avraham raises a seemingly unrelated issue. Avraham had developed a well. Avimelech's servants had forced Avraham to abandon the well and taken control of this resource. Avraham rebuked Avimelech for allowing this theft to occur in his kingdom. Avimelech responded that he was unaware of the crime. He should not be held accountable for this wrongdoing. Avraham apparently accepts this explanation and completes the covenant.

Avraham's actions are difficult to understand. First, he agrees to the covenant. However, he does not enter into the agreement immediately. He rebukes Avimelech. After the rebuke, he completes the covenant. It seems that the incident of the well deeply concerned Avraham. He had

misgivings regarding Avimelech's honesty. He should have questioned Avimelech before agreeing to the covenant! Once Avraham had agreed to the covenant, why did he question Avimelech's actions?

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam offers an interesting response. He explains that Avraham had agreed to enter into a covenant of peace. This action implied that Avraham did not bear any animosity toward Avimelech. However, Avraham realized that at this point such an agreement would be misleading. He did have grave concerns over Avimelech's honesty. The agreement to enter into the covenant required that these issues be resolved.

Now Avraham's behavior is understood. He did not seek out Avimelech. However, once he agreed to a covenant, he felt obligated to reveal his true concerns. After the concerns were addressed to Avraham's satisfaction he was willing to complete the agreement. Now the covenant would honestly reflect Avraham's attitude.[4] □

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 18:2.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 2:1.

[3] Rabbaynu Nissim ben Reuven Gerondi (Ran), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 18:16.

[4] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 21:25.

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SATAN & ABRAHAM

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Talmud Sanhedrin 89b: "And it was after these things, and God tested Abraham." (Genesis 22:1 regarding God's command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac).

"Rabbi Yochanan said in Rabbi Yosi ben Zimra's name, 'after these things' refers to 'after the words of Satan'. As it says, 'the lad grew and was weaned.' Upon which Satan said to God, 'Master of the world, this old man (Abraham) you graciously gave a child at 100 years of age. At all his feasts, did he not have one turtle dove or one pigeon to offer to you?' God said, 'Has he done this only for his son? If I would say sacrifice your son before me, he would do so.' Immediately 'God tested Abraham saying take 'na' (please) your son.....' Rabbi Simeon ben Abba said 'na' refers only to a pleaded request.' This is allegorical to a earthly king who fought many wars and was victorious through the help of a great warrior. In time, the king was faced with a very strong battle. He pleaded with the warrior, 'stand with me in this battle, so my previous battles won't be disparaged saying there were no previous successes'. So too is the case here, God pleaded with Abraham, 'I tested you with many trials, and you were triumphant in them all. Now, stand though this test so they should not say there were no real triumphs in your previous trials.'"



Was does it mean that God pleaded with Abraham? What is the concept being taught that the purpose in Abraham's trial required sacrificing his son? It seems it is only a response to Satan. Who does Satan represent here?

Sometimes, Satan refers to the person himself, i.e., Abraham. But this is not the case here. Abraham was not found to be not telling God something negative about himself. To whom can Satan refer? I believe it is the people of the land, those who seek to mock Abraham.

Upon Abraham "celebrating" his son's physical maturity, this raised suspicion among the people as to Abraham's true level of perfection. The people (Satan) harbored feelings that Abraham was not as great as he made himself out to be. Perhaps they were astounded at his ability to have a child at 100 years of age. The people of the land were jealous of God's divine intervention with Abraham. Why did this pose such jealousy? People saw someone as righteous as Abraham, being successful in all of his trials. His trials were undoubtedly publicized

as the allegory teaches, and such perfection in Abraham conveyed to them by contrast, their own lack of perfection. They were jealous and felt animosity towards Abraham.

Why jealousy and animosity? They sought to degrade his perfection, portraying him no better than they are. Belittling Abraham's triumphs of God's trials, they can now live with themselves. They no longer feel less than perfect, as Abraham himself is not perfect. They can say, "If Abraham couldn't pass the hardest test, he probably didn't pass the easier ones". The people's sentiment - referred to as Satan - harbors the notion that Abraham would not sacrifice Isaac and he could not achieve ultimate perfection. In order to substantiate to the world that man can indeed reach perfection, God caused Abraham to pass the ultimate test. God's will is that His desired lifestyle for man be shown as an achievable phenomena, not something so lofty that no man can succeed. To teach the world that man can reach the heights of perfection, God instructed Abraham in this most difficult trial. It is recorded as God "pleading" with Abraham, to teach us

that such a trial is essential for mankind to witness.

We learn that this trial of sacrificing Isaac was not only to actualize Abraham's own perfection, but it was also designed to teach us that God's desired perfection for mankind is within reach. When the world sees a man who can perfect himself to such a degree, it removes all rationalizations posed by weaker peoples, which justify their continued laziness and lack of perfection. But now that Abraham passed this test too, the world must admit that God's plan for man is achievable - by all mankind. Abraham's ultimate trial teaches such a valuable lesson; that God's will is achievable.

Our metaphor means that Abraham - the warrior - made God's system successful on many occasions. He followed and taught God's monotheism, and perfected his character traits. But people still felt if Abraham doesn't stand the toughest test, he is nothing. They sought justification for their immoral lives. God 'pleaded' with His warrior to help Him succeed in this great battle - sacrificing Isaac. God could not win the battle Himself, as the only victory (God proving His system as perfect and within man's reach) must be through mortal man and the use of his free will. Only by a man - Abraham - displaying such devotion to God, will God's system emerge victorious, and achievable. ■