

The Riches of His Mercy to Save us

This week's reading from *Parashat Vayera* (*Shemot / Genesis 18:1-22:24*) opens saying, וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵי, “*the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre.*” In the portion for this week, there is a lot that is going on, the Lord God almighty visits Abraham along with two men who are believed to be angels from the Lord (*18:1-3*), Abraham learns that his wife Sarah is going to bear a son (*18:9-15*), the Lord speaks to Abraham about the destruction of Sodom and Gemorah, and Abraham intercedes seeking mercy for these evil cities for the sake of the righteous (*18:17-33*). We are told that the Lord has mercy on Lot and Lot does recognize the mercy and grace of God who delivered him from that evil place and from destruction (*19:19*). Lot's daughters commit sexual sin with their father (*19:31-38*) and two nations are born. Abraham encounters Abimelech and Abimelech takes Sarah for his wife. The Lord God prevents Abimelech from having sexual relations with Sarah and the Lord curses his household and the Lord speaks with him in a dream. We are told that Abraham receives his wife back, and prays for Abimelech and the Lord forgiveness him and heals his household (*20:1-18*). In addition, this week's study includes the Akeda, the binding of Isaac, one of the most terrifying and challenging stories in all of Torah where the Lord tests Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac (*22:1-18*). The Lord repeats His blessing to Abraham following his faith to obey the Lord to offer his son on the altar in *Bereshit / Genesis 22*. (Note that the Lord repeats, *22:18 'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'* NASB) There is a very large amount of time that has passed in the narrative from the promise that he was going to have a son, to his son being old enough to carry the firewood for the sacrifice during the Akeda.

While reading through the Torah portion, the Scriptures reveal that the Lord has great plans for Abraham saying “*Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do*”? Why do you think the Lord God chooses to take counsel in Abraham here with regard to the unrighteous peoples of the land? As we can see, Abraham's faith did not diminish over the years, it only increased. Notice how Abraham was quick to serve and to speak on behalf of others. Let's discuss what is the significance of the Lord God

seeking to reveal His plans to Abraham.

ספר בראשית פרק יח Bereshit / Genesis 18:16-21

טז וַיִּקְמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁקֹפוּ
עַל-פְּנֵי סְדֹם וְאַבְרָהָם הֵלֵךְ עִמָּם
לְשַׁלְּחָם: יז וַיְהִי וְאָמַר הַמַּכְסָּה
אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי עֹשֶׂה: יח
וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִיָּה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעֲצוּם
וְנִבְרָכוּ-בוֹ כָּל-גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ: יט כִּי
יִדְעֶתִיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא אֶת-בְּנָיו
וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָךְ יְהוָה
לְעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא
יְהוָה עַל-אַבְרָהָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר
עָלָיו: כ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה זַעֲקַת סְדֹם
וְעַמּוֹרָה כִּי-רַבָּה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כְבֹדָה
מְאֹד: כא אֲרַדְּהָ-נָּא וְאַרְאֶה הַכְּצֵעַ-
קַתָּה הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ | כָּלָה וְאִם-לֹא
אֲדַעָה:

18:16 Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off. 18:17 The Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18:18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? 18:19 'For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.' 18:20 And the Lord said, 'The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 18:21 'I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.' (NASB)

The question is, why was it important for the Lord to reveal to Abraham what He was about to do in Sodom and Gomorrah? Why did the Lord take counsel in Abraham in what He was about to do? In the *Talmud Bavli Pirkei Avot 1:15* and *Sanhedrin 56b, verse 16*, the rabbis say the following,

Talmud Bavli Pirkei Avot 1:15

Shammai says: Make your Torah permanent, say little and do much, and receive every person with a pleasant countenance. שַׁמַּי אָמַר, עֲשֵׂה תוֹרַתְךָ קְבִיעַ. אָמַר מְעַט וְעֲשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה, וְהָיוּ מִקְבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסִבָּר פָּנִים יְפוֹת:

Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 56b:16

“And he commanded” means establishing justice. For it says (Genesis 18:19): “For I know concerning him that he will command his children after him.” ויצו אלו הדינין וכן הוא אומר (בראשית יח, יט) כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו וגו’

The idea of being of pleasant countenance and establishing justice, are both of the things in which Abraham exhibited as a result of his faith in the Lord God in heaven. These are the concepts that are spoken of in *Hebrews 13:1 Let love of the brethren continue. 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (NASB) Pirkei Avot 1:15* speaks of making “*your torah / instruction*” permanent (עֲשֵׂה תוֹרָתְךָ קִבֵּעַ), saying little, and receiving people. The idea is that what we teach we should live. Instructions are given on what we should teaching, that we are to have an attitude of serving others, and to receive others with pleasantness.

יז ויהוה אָמַר הַמְכֹסֶה אֲנִי, מאברהם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה: יח וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעַצוֹם וְנִבְרָכוּ-בוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ: יט כִּי יִדְעַתִּי לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת-בְּנָיו וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָוּךְ יְהוָה: *18:17 The Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18:18 since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? 18:19 ‘For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.’ (NASB)* God says that the reason for revealing to Abraham his plans is because he will command (יִצְוֶה) his children (אֶת-בְּנָיו) and his house (וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ) to keep the way of the Lord (וְשָׁמְרוּ דְרָוּךְ יְהוָה) to do righteousness (לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה) and justice (וּמִשְׁפָּט). We have read thus far that Abraham was a righteous man, he argued on behalf of the unrighteous for the sake of the righteous, he was hospitable, and that He would command his children, suggesting when the Lord gives him a testimony, he will do what the Lord asks of him. Does this suggest that by walking in righteousness and justice, to observe the ways of the Lord, He will reveal His plans for us and for those

around us? Possibly!

The Jewish commentators Rashbam, Sforno, and Radak have the following to say concerning this question of “*Why would the Lord take counsel in Abraham?*”

Rashbam on Bereshit / Genesis 18:17

המכסה אני מאברהם, *the fact that I am about to overturn Sodom and its satellite towns. G'd reasoned seeing that Avraham was sure to tell his descendants of G'd's promise to him to give the whole land of Canaan to his descendants, He would diminish these descendants' inheritance by utterly destroying these towns and the valley which were part of area promised to the Jewish people as an inheritance. He therefore felt duty-bound to obtain Avraham's consent of what He was about to do. We had learned in Bereshit / Genesis 10:19 that the boundaries of the Canaanite extended to regions that included the Jordan valley. G'd considered it inappropriate to deny Avraham fulfillment of part of His promise by making these parts of the land of Canaan totally useless to its inhabitants.* המכסה אני מאברהם - מה שאני רוצה להפוך את סדום ואני יודע שבניו ישמרו דרך ה' ויזכו להביא עליהם את אשר דבר לאברהם לתת להם את ארץ כנען ואלו העיירות מנחלת בניו הם, כדכתיב: בגבול בני כנען בפרשת נח, ויהי גבול הכנעני מצידן באכה גררה עד עזה באכה סדומה ועמורה אדמה וצביים עד לשע. ואיך אחריב קרקע שלו וקרקע בניו שלא מדעתו?

Notice the reason Rashbam gives for the Lord taking counsel in Abraham, that he would tell his children of God's promises to him. The Lord promised the Land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendents, and therefore the Lord was looking to describe what He was going to do because of sin in the Land. Note also how the Lord was cutting short the peoples lives due to their sins. The important point we can take away from Rashbam is that it was necessary to explain the reason for the punishment (destruction) in order to be a testimony for future generations.

Sforno on Genesis 18:19

ושמרו... לעשות צדקה ומשפט למען הביא ה' על אברהם את אשר.
The ultimate purpose of G'd in revealing to Avraham His manner of meting out justice was to ensure that He would have an opportunity to fulfill all the promises He had made to Avraham. [promises which were largely conditional on Avraham's offspring being true to his teachings. Ed.]

Sforno states that the Lord revealing what He was going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah, He was ensuring that Abraham would instruct his children in righteousness and justice having seen the consequences of sin. A common theme that may be drawn out from the Torah is that destruction is dependent upon one's faithfulness. (see *1 Corinthians 10-11*)

Radak on Bereshit / Genesis 18:19

למען אשר יצוה את בניו שישמרו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט
so that Avraham will say to his children that if they practice and emulate G'd's ways of performing charitable deeds and at the same time endeavor for justice to prevail, their lives will be successful seeing G'd will help them. They will then experience the fulfillment of all the promises (conditional) which I, G'd, have made to him concerning his offspring. If they fail to emulate that lifestyle these promises are liable not to be fulfilled." If there are among his children some who argue that G'd does not concern Himself with the deeds of individuals, as opposed to the conduct of nations, remind them of what happened to the Sodomites so that they realize that G'd does indeed watch closely over the actions of even small communities. In the event such non-believers would argue that what happened to the Sodomites was an accident of nature, an earthquake, such as we all experience in different parts of the earth, Avraham could reply that G'd had advised him of that event in advance so that it could not be explained away as a natural event.

Radak states that this story represents the idea that God is giving Abraham the opportunity to instruct his children in this matter, to practice, and emulate the ways of the Lord in performing charitable deeds, to do justice, and to show mercy. Only then will their lives be successful in the Land the Lord is giving them. The Lord is concerned with the individual. The purpose of telling Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah is to explain how the Lord is interested in the deeds of individuals, that God does watch closely over the actions of individuals and communities. Radak's conclusion for the Lord speaking to Abraham concerning what He was about to do, was for the reasons stated above, and so that the events would not be explained away as a "*natural disaster*" which suggests something that occurs outside of recognizing it is the Lord who is meting out justice towards the sinful people. The Lord chose to reveal to Abraham what he was about to do and to save Lot, a righteous man being vexed with unrighteousness. These things bear the testimony that the Lord is merciful and full of grace.

Concerning the topic of the testimony and the Lord revealing to Abraham his plans, we read in the Apostolic Writings of the Apostle Paul saying something very similar in *1 Corinthians 1:24-31*.

1 Corinthians 1:24-31

1:24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 1:29 so that no man may boast before God. 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 1:31 so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.' (NASB)

²⁴αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλησιν, Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ σοφίαν: ²⁵ὅτι τὸ μωρὸν τοῦ θεοῦ σοφώτερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστίν, καὶ τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ θεοῦ ἰσχυρότερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων. ²⁶Βλέπετε γὰρ τὴν κλήσιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί, οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς: ²⁷ἀλλὰ τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς ἵνα καταισχύνη τοὺς σοφοὺς, καὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς ἵνα καταισχύνη τὰ ἰσχυρά, ²⁸καὶ τὰ ἀγενῆ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἐξουθενημένα ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ, ²⁹ὅπως μὴ καυχῆσθαι πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. ³⁰Ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὃς ἐγενήθη σοφία ἡμῖν ἀπὸ θεοῦ, δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμὸς καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις, ³¹ἵνα καθὼς γέγραπται, Ὁ καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθω.

Notice here in *1 Corinthians 1:27-28*, Paul speaks of the Lord's eklegomai (*choosing*, ἐκλέγομαι). The Lord's choosing is synonymous to separation, and the point Paul is making is the Lord working in such a way so as to distinguish us from the world, He has chosen us out of the world to make us His own. This has a direct parallel to the Lord's choosing Abraham and making Him and his children God's own. In making us His own, Paul says, *1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom (σοφία sophia) from God, and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη dikaiosynē) and sanctification (ἁγιασμὸς hagiasmos), and redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις apolytrōsis).* (NASB) We now have a special kind of sonship to the Lord God in heaven, in the Messiah Yeshua, and are partakers of the blessings of Abraham. The point is that as the children of God, the Lord works in our lives and reveals His plans to us for the purpose of bearing God's testimony before men. This is emphasized in the act of the need to instruct our children in this matter, to practice, and emulate the ways of the Lord in performing charitable deeds, to do justice, and to show mercy towards others.

Regarding the manner in which our lives change, the *Talmud Bavli Pirkei Avot 5:10* states the following:

Talmud Bavli Pirkei Avot 5:10

There are four kinds of people: the one who says “what is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours” -- that’s a “beinonit” (בִּינוּנִית, a in between person). There are some who say that is the kind of people that were in Sodom. [A second type is one who says] “what is mine is yours, and what is yours is mine” -- [that’s an] “am ha’aretz” (הָאֲרֶץ, uneducated or Earthly person). [A third type is one who says] “what is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours” -- [that’s a] “chasid” (חֲסִיד, righteous person). [A final type is one who says] “what is yours is mine, and what is mine is mine” -- [that’s a] “rasha” (רָשָׁע, wicked person). אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּאָדָם. הָאוֹמֵר שְׁלִי וְשִׁלָּה שְׁלָהּ, זוֹ מִדָּה בִּינוּנִית. וַיֵּשׁ אֲוֹמְרִים, זוֹ מִדַּת סְדוֹם. שְׁלִי שְׁלָהּ וְשִׁלָּה שְׁלִי, עִם הָאֲרֶץ. שְׁלִי שְׁלָהּ וְשִׁלָּה שְׁלָהּ, חֲסִיד. שְׁלִי שְׁלָהּ וְשִׁלָּה שְׁלִי, רָשָׁע:

The Talmud speaks of four people, (i) a separatist, (ii) an earthly or fleshly person, (iii) a righteous person, and (iv) a wicked person. The idea is that as a child of God, we are to be God’s Chasidim (חֲסִידִים, righteous ones), sharing what we have and what we have learned with all men. It may be in this manner in which the Lord thought to speak to Abraham regarding Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham was a Chasid (חֲסִיד) who argued for the case of the unrighteous on behalf of the righteous persons who lived in their midst. We are to be careful about the commandments in the sense that those who are around us are watching, and observing the manner in which we live our lives. The commandment for charity as an example, is a positive command for a sign of the righteous seed of Abraham, as it says *“For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness...”* The *“True Faith”* is preserved through living what we believe, and seek out those who are lost to share the gospel message.

What we can take away from this week’s Torah portion is the idea that is related to the question of, why it was important for the Lord to reveal to Abraham what He was about to do in Sodom and Gomorrah. Why did the Lord take counsel in Abraham in what He was about to do? The conclusion is that Abraham would obey the Lord to instruct his children

bearing witness (the testimony) of how the Lord had worked in his life. The point for us today is in the Messiah Yeshua, we are given a testimony to share with our children and with others. As the children of God, the Lord works in our lives and reveals His plans to us for the purpose of bearing His testimony before men, the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah, his death, burial, and bodily resurrection. This is emphasized in the Torah portion in the need to instruct our children in this matter, to practice, and to emulate the ways of the Lord in being charitable towards others, to do justice, and to show mercy, because the Lord God our Father in heaven has shown us mercy in His Son, Yeshua the Messiah! The Lord God in heaven has revealed His plans for us, according to the Scriptures, to abide in the Messiah, and to speak of the greatness of the riches of his mercy and grace to save us from our sins! Praise the Lord!



