

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter IV: Vaveira (Gen. 18:1–22:24)

Essay 13. Lot enriched himself at the expense of Sodom

סנהדרין פֶּרֶק חֲלָק אֶמְרוּ בּוֹאוּ וְנִשְׁכַּח אֶת הַרְגֵל מִבֵּינֵינוּ וְשִׂינָן בָּאִים עָלֵינוּ אֶלָּא לְחִסְרוֹנוֹ מִמוֹנְנוּ עכ"ל.

Tractate **Sanhedrin, chapter 11**, entitled “All of Israel have a **portion** in the World-to-Come”: “The people of Sodom **said**: Since [we live in] a land from which bread comes and has the dust of gold [we have everything that we need]. **Come, let us cause the travelers to be forgotten from amongst us, for they come to us only to deprive us of our property.**”¹

קִשָּׁה מֵהוּ וְשִׂינָן בָּאִים אֶלָּא לְחִסְרוֹנוֹ, וְכִי הָאוֹרְחִים מְסַרִּים אֶדְרָבָא מְרוֹיחִים וְשִׁהְרֵי פִמָּה וְכַמָּה עוֹשִׂים פּוֹנְדִקָאוֹת כְּדֵי לְהַרְוִיחַ. וְעוֹד מִצִּינוּ בְּמִשְׁחָה וְשִׁשְׁלַח מְלָאכִים אֶל מֶלֶךְ אֲדוֹם לְעִבּוֹר בְּאַרְצוֹ וְאָמַר לוֹ "וְלֹא נִשְׁתָּה מִי בְּאֶרֶץ". וּפְרָשׁ רִש"י שֶׁם, אַף עַל פִּי שִׁישׁ לָנוּ מִן וּבְאֶרֶץ נִקְנָה מִכֶּם אוֹכֵל וּמֵיִם לְהַנְאֻתְכֶם וְכוּ'. הָא קָמֵן וְשִׁהְאוֹרְחִים הֵם מֵהַנִּים לְבַעַל הַבַּיִת.

A difficulty are the words “**they only come to deprive us,**” **for do guests deprive, to the contrary they enrich, for a number of people establish inns by which to profit** from travelers. **We also find regarding Moses, that he sent messengers to the king of Edom** requesting permission **to cross through his land, and he said to him,** “We will not pass through fields or vineyards, **and we will not drink water from the well;** we will follow the king’s highway, turning off neither to the right nor to the left until we have crossed your territory” (Num. 20:17). **Rashi explained there:** “**Although we have manna** to eat, **and a well** of which to drink,² we will not drink of it, but **we will buy food and water from you to your advantage.**” **We have this before us** as proof, **that the guests are beneficial to the innkeeper;** not only do they pay for a bed, but they buy food and drink.

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¹ Sanhedrin 109a.

² Referring to the well that accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness, in the merit of Miriam. Taanit 9a; Rashi to Num. 20:2.

ואי משום העניינים הבאים לגור שם הנה להם לגזור שלא לקבל שום עני. ואי משום שאין להם צורך בהרנקה הואיל ש"ארץ ממנה יצא להם" וכו', מכל מקום לא שיידו הלשון שאינם באים אלא לחסרנו. ועוד למה אמרו בלשון שלילה שאינם באים אלא לחסרנו, הנה לו לומר בלשון קצרה שבאים עלינו לחסרנו.

If it says “they only come to deprive us” because of the poor people that come to live there, they could have decreed not to receive any poor person. Instead, they didn’t want any visitors. If they don’t want guests because they don’t need the relief because of the “earth, out of which food grows” (Job 28:5), in any event, the language that they don’t want guests because “they only come to deprive us” is not appropriate. Furthermore, why did they speak in the negative, literally, in five words, “they are not coming to us, except to deprive us,” as [the people of Sodom] could have said it in a more concise language, i.e., in three words, that “they are coming to us to deprive us.”

ויש לומר דאיתא במדרש על פסוק "בהפך את הערים אשר יושב בהן לוט", וכי אפשר שלוט הנה יושב בכל הערים? והלא לא הנה יושב אלא באחד מהן? רבנין אמרי שהנה מלנה בריבית לכל העירות כולן עכ"ל. וידוע הוא שהירבית עולה על הלנה ומחסר ממונו מעט מעט, נמצא שלוט הנה מראה להם שעושה גמילות חסד להלותו להם בעת צרכיהם, אבל מפני שהנה נוטל מהם ריבית הנה להם חסרון גדול, והואיל שלוט הנה אורח אצלם לכן אמרו שאינם באים אלא לחסרנו, אף על פי שגראה מתחלה שעושה חסד להלות, מכל מקום הואיל שלבסוף נוטל ריבית הוא חסרון גדול.

It can be said what is brought in the midrash (Gen. Rabbah 51:6) on the verse, “And it came to pass, when G-d destroyed the cities of the Plain, that G-d remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelled” (Gen. 19:29). Is it possible that Lot dwelled in all of the cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim? Wouldn’t he have just dwelled in one of them, Sodom? The midrash, Gen Rabbah 51:6, tells us: “The rabbis said that he was lending with interest in all of the cities.”

It’s known that the interest adds up for the borrower and slowly deprives him of his money. It’s found that Lot was showing them that he was doing them a kindness to lend to them in their time of need, but because he was taking interest from them, they had significant loss, and since Lot was their guest, they said that “they are not coming to us, except to deprive us.” Even though it appeared at the beginning that he was doing a kindness to lend money, in any regard, since at the end he was taking interest from them, it was a great deprivation.

So at first the people of Sodom and the other cities accepted Lot, and they thought he was doing a good deed. Perhaps they were unfamiliar with the concept of interest, or the effect of it, and in the end, they saw that it caused them a great loss. That’s why they spoke in the negative language recorded in the Gemara, “You may think he’s coming to us to help us. But he’s not coming to us to help us. Rather, he’s coming to us to deprive us.” As a result of Lot’s actions, the people of Sodom decided that they didn’t want any visitors.

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