

קִשָּׁה לָמָּה אֶחָזוּ הַקַּב"ה בְּנִדּוֹ, וּמָהוּ הִנֵּה מְטַיֵּיל בּוֹ אַרְוֹכּוֹת וּקְצָרוֹת. וְעוֹד קִשָּׁה מָה לוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם לְשׂאֹל בְּנֵי הַיֶּכֶן הֵם, וְכִי אֵינּוּ זֹכֵר עוֹד בְּרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים שֶׁבְּאוֹתוֹ הַבְּרִית בֵּינָר הוּא עֲצָמוֹ הַגְּלוּת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל? וְאִם תֹּאמֶר שֶׁכְּנֻנָּה אֶחָרָת הִיָּתָה לוֹ לְאַבְרָהָם בְּשׂאֵלָה זוֹ, אִם כֵּן מָה זֶה תְּשׁוּבָה שְׁנוּתָן לוֹ הַקַּב"ה, חֲטָאוּ וְהִגְלִיתִים בֵּין הָאוּמוֹת? גַּם הוּא יוֹדֵעַ זֶה וְאֶפִּילוּ הַכִּי שׂאֵל הַיֶּכֶן בְּנֵי הֵם.

There is a difficulty why it says that the Holy One, Blessed be He, grabbed [Abraham] with ‘His hand’ instead of saying ‘His right hand,’ and why He walked him long ways and short ways, i.e, back and forth. Another difficulty is why Abraham asked, “Where are my children,” for didn’t he remember anymore the Covenant Between the Parts, for in this same covenant, He Himself explained the Exile of Israel, i.e., that Abraham would have a great number of descendants (Gen. 15:5) and that the Nation of Israel would face exile, but would ultimately be redeemed (Gen. 15:13–14) and would inherit the Land of Israel (Gen. 15:7–8). If you’ll say that Abraham had a different intent with this question, if so, what was this answer that the Holy One, Blessed be He gave [Abraham], “They sinned and I sent them to exile among the nations”? He knew that, and even so he asked, “Where are my children?”

וְעוֹד כְּשֶׁשֶּׂאֵל לֹא הָיוּ בָּהֶם צְדִיקִים, הִנֵּה לוֹ לְהַשִּׁיב אֵין בָּהֶם צְדִיקִים! וּמָהוּ הַלְשׁוֹן שֶׁל עֲשׂוֹתָהּ הַמְזִימָתָה דְּנִקְטָ? וּמָהוּ זֶה שֶׁחֹזֵר וְשׂאֵל הִנֵּה לָּךְ לְהַסְתַּכֵּל בְּטוֹבִים וְכוּ', דְּהֵלָא אִם לֹא יֵשׁ צְדִיקִים לֹא יִהְיוּ נְמוּי טוֹבִים, דְּמָה הַפְּרָשׁ יֵשׁ בֵּין הַצְדִיקִים לְטוֹבִים וְכוּ'? וְאִם כֵּן הִנֵּה לוֹ לְהַשִּׁיב אֵין בָּהֶם טוֹבִים, וּמָהוּ סוּגִיָּהוֹן בִּישׁוּן דְּנִקְטָ?

Furthermore, when [Abraham] asked Him if there were no righteous among them, He could have answered that there were no righteous among them! What is this language that was given that “they did so many vile deeds”? Why did [Abraham] continue by asking why He didn’t look at the good among them, for if there were no righteous there also wouldn’t be good people, for what distinction is there between righteous people and good people? Also, [G-d] could have answered that there were no good among them; what is this answer that “the great majority of them are bad”?

וְעוֹד אֶחָר כִּי חֹזֵר וְשׂאֵל שֶׁהִנֵּה לוֹ לְהַבִּיט בְּמִילָה שֶׁבְּבָשָׂרָם, מָה עֲנִין מִלָּה לְכַאֵן? וּמָהוּ וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שֶׁהָיוּ אֵלוּ שְׂמֵחִים בְּמַפְלְתָן שֶׁל אֵלוּ, תְּרַמֵּי תְּשׁוּבוֹת לָמָּה לִי? סוּף דְּבַר הַמְדַרְשׁ הִנֵּה כְּלוּ מְקִשָּׁה וְאִידָּ מִמִּקְשָׁרִים הַעֲנִינִים זֶה עִם זֶה?

Furthermore, afterward [Abraham] continued by asking that He should look at the circumcision of their flesh; what relevance is the circumcision to this? What is this, “Not only that, but they took delight in the misfortune of each other”; why do I have two answers? The end result is that the entire Midrash is difficult to understand and how do [people] connect these issues to each other?

וגיש לומר דאיתא במדרש תהלים ואמר חלומי היא שנות זמין עליון, על ידי שלא עשינו תשובה נשתנית הזמין עכ"ל. וידוע שהשמאל נקראת יד סתם ועכשוו שהזמין נשתנית נקראת אף היא יד סתם, ולכן אָחָזוּ הקב"ה בידו ולא בזמין, כמו שהיה מן הראוי כדכתיב חסד לאברהם, להראות לו שהזמין נשתנית, חס ושלום.

It can be said that it's brought in the Midrash Tehillim, " 'And I said, "It is my fault that the right hand of the Most High has changed" ' (Ps. 77:11), it's because we didn't repent that His right hand was changed" (Lam. Rabbah 1:23). G-d used to wage war with His right hand, to defend us against our enemies. But because of our sins, He no longer uses His right hand in this way. It's known that the left hand is simply called "hand" and now that the right hand has changed, it is also simply called "hand." Therefore, that is the reason that it says that the Holy One, Blessed be He, grabbed him "with His hand" and why it does not say "His right hand," which would be appropriate, as it is written, "You will be faithful to Jacob and show kindness to Abraham" (Micah 7:20), to show him that the right hand has changed (G-d forbid).

והנה [ה] מטיל עמו ארופות וקצרות, דאיתא במדרש על פסוק כי אם-מאס מאסתנו אם מאיסה היא לית סבר ואם קציפה היא אית סבר. כלומר הנה מראה לו כל הארץ אף שנשא להם לישראל, ואף על פי כן לא חזרו בתשובה, וזהו ארופות. ועוד הנה מראה לו קצרות דהיינו הן לא-קצרה גדה' מהושיע.

He walked with [Abraham] long ways and short ways, i.e., back and forth, as it is brought in the Midrash on the verse, "For truly, You have rejected us, with great anger against us" (Lam 5:22): "If it be a rejection, there is no hope of a reconciliation, but if it be anger, there is hope" (Lam. Rabbah 1:23). That is to say, he showed [Abraham] the great latitude that He allowed to them, to Israel, but nevertheless they didn't return to Him in repentance, and this is the meaning of "a long way," reflecting the possibility of "a rejection." But He also showed [Abraham] the short way, which is, "No, the L-rd's arm is not too short to save" (Isaiah 59:1), reflecting the possibility that G-d was merely angry, in which case there was a hope of a reconciliation.

אמר לו מה לידידי בבית? אין לה מקום להתרעם אם נחרב הבית ונשרף המקדש. לפי שהיה אהל שלי ובעל הבית יכול לעשות בביתו מה שרוצה. וידוע שהמקדש נקרא משכן לפי שעתיד להתמשכן לכפרת עוונותיהם של ישראל, ועוד אמרו ז"ל שהקב"ה שפף חמתו על עצים ואבנים כדי להציל את ישראל, וכן כתיב פלה ה' את-חמתו וכו' וניצת-אש בציון וכו'.

He said to [Abraham], "Why is My beloved in my House? You have no room to be indignant if the House is destroyed and if the Tabernacle is burned, for it's My Tent, and the homeowner can do whatever he wants in his house." It's known that the Temple is called Tabernacle because its future is to be pledged¹ as an atonement for the sins of Israel.²

¹ The Hebrew word משכן (*mishkan*) (Tabernacle, habitation) has the same root as להתמשכן (*lehitmashken*) (to be pledged, to be mortgaged).

² Midrash Tanchuma, Pekudei 2:4: "Why is the word *mishkan* ('Tabernacle') repeated (in Ex. 38:21)? R. Samuel said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, would in the future seize it (the Temple) twice as a pledge (*mashkon*):

Furthermore, the rabbis of blessed memory said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, poured out his wrath on the wood and stones in order to save Israel (Lam. Rabbah 4:15), i.e., G-d diverted his anger from the people to the inanimate objects, and thus it's written, "The Lord vented all His fury, poured out His blazing wrath; He kindled a fire in Zion which consumed its foundations" (Lam. 4:11).

ומעמיה פנונת אברהם היתה להקשות להקב"ה פרמי פפרות למה לי, הלא בחדא מנייהו סגי? דאם יש הגלות כמו שנגזר בברית בין הבתרים לא היה צורך לבית המקדש להתמשכן, אלא יתקיימו הצדיקים בבית המקדש ויתקיים בית המקדש עמיהם, והחוטאים יגלו מארצם ומנחלתם, ואם נחרב הבית אין צורך עוד לגלות, שכבר נתנו המשכן, אלא יהיו משועבדים למלכי הארצות ובל יתקיימו בארצם.

Now we see the intent of Abraham was to question the Holy One, Blessed be He, "Why do I have two atonements, i.e., the exile and the destruction of the Temple; isn't one of them enough?" For if the exile is as decreed in the Covenant Between the Parts, there would be no need for the Temple to be pledged as an atonement. Rather, the righteous would exist in the Temple, and the Temple would exist with them, and only the sinners would be exiled from their Land and from their inheritance. But if the House would be destroyed, there would be no need for a further exile, for the pledge would have been given; rather they would be slaves to the kings of the nations and they would not exist in their Land. I.e., why couldn't there just be an exile for the wicked ones, which would not affect the Temple, and the good ones could continue to worship there. Whereas the destruction of the Temple is a dual punishment, for it also leads to exile of the entire nation.

והשיב לו הקב"ה חטאו והגליתים, כלומר בלא גלות אי אפשר, שהרי הם חטאו ונגרמו שיפלו כמה ניצוצות של הקדושה בתוך הקלפה. אם כן התיקון הוא שיתפזרו בין האומות כדי לתזור וללקוט ניצוצות המובלעים שם ולהחזירם אל הקדושה. כדאמרינו בפסחים פלום אדם זרע סאה אלא להוציא ממנה כמה כורין, הדא הוא דכתיב וזרעתיה לי בארץ, שעל ידי הגלות מתוספים בישראל הרבה גרים, וזהו התיקון לפגם שעשו, ומתקנים הכתוב שחזרה אני ונאנה.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, answered him, "They sinned and I sent them to exile," as if to say that without exile it would not be possible for them to be in their Land, as they sinned and caused a number of sparks of holiness to fall within the *klipa* (husk of impurity). If so, the correction is for them to be dispersed among the nations in order to return in repentance and to gather the sparks absorbed there and to return them to the level of holiness. As it says in Pesachim (87b), "no man sows a *seah* of seed except with the intent to bring forth from it a number of *kors*,"³ this is as it's written, "I will sow her in the land" (Hosea 2:25), i.e., the prophecy of Hosea pertains to the remnant of Abraham's offspring who will return from captivity, together with converts to Judaism that they bring with them. For because of the exile,

at the time of its first destruction and again at its second destruction. Therefore, He repeated the word *mishkan*." See also Ex. Rabbah 51:3.

³ A *seah* is a unit of dry measure equal to the volume of 144 medium-sized eggs. A *kor* is 30 times the volume of a *seah*.

many converts were gathered within Israel, and this is the correction to the defect that [Israel] created by sinning, fulfilling that which is written, “I am dark, but comely” (Song of Songs 1:5).

אָמַנְם זֶה הַגְּלוּת לֹא הָיָה יְכוּל לְהִתְקַיֵּם כָּל זְמַן וְשִׁבִית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קָיָים, כִּדְאָמְרֵינוּ בְּסוּף פָּרָק מְרוּבָה כָּל זְמַן שְׁעוֹסְקִין בְּעִבּוּדָה אִין נְמֻסְרִים בְּנִדְכָם וְכוּ'. וְעוֹד שְׁסוּד הַקְּרָבָנוֹת וְהַקְּטוּרָת הֵם לְהַתִּישׁ כֵּם מִדַּת הַדִּין וְהַקְּלִיפּוֹת, וְעוֹלָם תָּמִיד הוּא בְּהִיפּוּד תּוֹלָ"ע, שְׁעַל יְדֵי עוֹלָת תָּמִיד הָיָה נִכְנָע הַתּוֹלָע הַטָּמֵא וּמִתְרַבֶּה הַחֹסֵד בְּעוֹלָם וְאִין כֵּם לְמַדַּת הַדִּין לְשִׁלוּט, וְעוֹד מִשׁוּם דְּקָתִיב עֲמוּז־אֲנֹכִי בְּצָרָה, כִּי־יִכּוֹל הַשְּׂכִינָה הִיא בְּגְלוּת עֲמֻנוּ, וְאֲנִי בְּתוֹד־הַגּוֹלָה, וְאִם הָיָה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קָיָים לֹא הָיָה מִתְקַיֵּם זֶה.

Actually, this exile could not have happened as long as the Temple existed, as it says at the end of the section Merubah,⁴ an old man who sympathized with the Greeks told them, “As long as [the Jews in Jerusalem] engage in the sacrificial service, they won’t be delivered into your hands” (Bava Kamma 82b). Also, an esoteric secret of the sacrifices and the incense spices is to exhaust the power of the attribute of strict justice and the *klipot*. The spelling of the word *olat* of the daily burnt offering is a transposition of the spelling of the word *tolah* (worm), for on account of the daily burnt offering, the *klipah* known as the unclean worm surrendered and the kindness grew in the world,⁵ and there was no power for the attribute of strict justice to rule. Also because, as it is written, “I will be with him in distress” (Ps. 91:15), as if to say that the Shechinah is in exile with us. As it is written, “I was in the community of exiles” (Ezek. 1:1), and if the Temple had been standing, this would not have been the case, for the Shechinah would have instead still been residing in the Temple.

וּמַעֲתָה אֲבָרְהָם אֲזִיל לְשִׁטְטִיתָהּ, שְׁלַמַּד סְנִיגוּרָיָא עַל אֲנָשֵׁי סְדוּם שְׂאָם יֵשׁ בְּהֵם צְדִיקִים, שְׁיִהְיוּ נִיצוּלִים אִף הֶרְשָׁעִים בְּזוֹתָם. וְהָכִי נָמִי הָיָה טוֹעֵן אֲבָרְהָם שְׂאָף אִם הֶרְשָׁעִים פָּגְמוּ בְּחַטָּאתָם וְגָרְמוּ פִירוּד בְּבַחֲבוֹת הַעֲלִיּוֹנוֹת, הֲלֹא הַצְדִיקִים בְּיִיחּוּדִים שְׁלָהֶם וּבְמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם הַטּוֹבִים יַעֲשׂוּ הַתִּיקוֹן הַצָּרִיךְ לְהַצִּיל עֲשׂוּקִים וּלְקַבֵּץ פְּזוּרִים וּלְהוֹצִיא בְלַעַם מִפִּיהֶם שֶׁל הַקְּלִיפָה, וּמִשׁוּם הָכִי שְׂאָל וְלֹא יֵשׁ בְּהֵם צְדִיקִים.

Now Abraham went to the position, that he learned from defending the people of Sodom, that if there were among them righteous, that even the wicked would be saved in their merit. In addition, Abraham claimed that even if the wicked caused harm by their sins and caused a schism in the uppermost aspects (*bechinot*), the righteous—through their meditative unifications (*yichudim*) and through their goods deeds—would accomplish the correction necessary to save the oppressed, and to gather the scattered, and to remove Bilaam as a mouthpiece of the *klipah*. This is the reason that he asked, “Aren’t there righteous among them?”

⁴ The seventh chapter of Bava Kamma, 62b–83a.

⁵ Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of the World of Action, 3:3–3:6.

והקב"ה השיב לו עשותה המזימה, ולא הנה יכול להשיב לו אין בהם צדיקים, שהרי לפי האמת היו שם הרבה צדיקים, אלא שאדרבא הוצרך לעשות בהם משפט תחלה לפי שלא מיהו בחוטאים, כדאמרנו בפרק ה' דשבת ה' במשפט יבא עם זקני עמו ושיריו וכו', ויחלו באנשים הזקנים וכו', ונהו עשותה המזימה שהניחו המזימה שתהא רבא והולכת.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, answered [Abraham], “[Israel] has done so many vile deeds” (Jer. 11:15), and He wasn’t able to answer him that there were no righteous among them. Truly there were many righteous; rather to the contrary, it was required to establish an initial justice because they didn’t protest against the sinners, as it says in the fifth section of Shabbat (54b–55a), “the L-rd will enter into judgment against the elders and officers of His people” (Isaiah 3:14), “so they began with the elders” (Ezek. 9:6), and this is the meaning of “[Israel] has done so many vile deeds,” that they permitted the evil to continue occurring.⁶

אמנם כאן צריך עיון: אם הם צדיקים, למה לא מיהו? ואם לא מיהו, למה נקראו צדיקים? ויש לומר דבמסכת שבת אמרנו שפכה עליהם את הקר כגיגית, ומכאן מודעא רבא לאורייתא. ופרש רש"י שאם נזמנם לדין יש להם תשובה שקבלוה באונס, וכתב הפך שבת דרכים (דרוש כ"ב) בשם התוספות ומהרי"ק, שאף על פי שחזרו בערבות מואב וקבלו עליהם את התורה בבירית ובשבועה, הואיל שמתחלה כפה עליהם את הקר וכחחו אז פחו עתה. ובגידו הנה גם פן שם לכפות עליהם כמה הרים וגבעות או להניעם במדבר ולא להביאם לארץ, חשיב שעדיין אונס הראשון קיים, ואף על מה שקבלו בערבות מואב חשיבו אנוסים, ויש להם המודעא כדמעיקרא ועיי"ש באורח.

Actually here we require investigation: if they were righteous, why didn’t they protest against the sinners? Conversely, if they didn’t protest, why are they called righteous? It is worth saying that in the tractate of Shabbat (88a) it says that [G-d] “overturned the mountain over them like a vessel,” and Rav Acha bar Ya’akov said that from here comes a substantial caveat to the obligation to fulfill the Torah. Rashi explains that if they were ordered to face judgment, they have an answer that they accepted [the Torah] under duress, and therefore it should not be binding. The Parashat Derachim wrote (in the 22nd essay),⁷ in the name of the Tosafot and the Maharik,⁸ that even though [the Laws] were repeated “in the fields of Moab” (Deut. 34:1) and [Israel] nevertheless once again accepted upon themselves the Torah by covenant and oath, since [their first acceptance] began by [G-d] overturning the mountain

⁶ Shabbat 54b–55a: “Anyone who had the capability to protest against the members of his household and did not protest, is apprehended for [the sins of] the members of his household. [If he is in a position to protest the sinful conduct of] the people of his town, [and he fails to do so,] he is apprehended for [the sins of] the people of his town. [If he is in a position to protest the sinful conduct of] the whole world, [and he fails to do so,] he is apprehended for [the sins of] the whole world. Rav Pappa said: And the members of the household of the Exilarch were apprehended for [the sins of] the whole world. As Rabbi Chanina said: What is that which is written: ‘The L-rd will enter into judgment against the elders of His people and its princes [saying: It is you who have eaten up the vineyard; the robbery of the poor is in your houses]’ (Isaiah 3:14)? If the princes sinned [by committing robbery], how did the elders sin? Rather, say the elders [were punished] because they did not protest [the sins of] the princes.”

⁷ Judah ben Samuel Rosanes (1657–1727), rabbi in Constantinople. His sefer Parashat Derachim (Constantinople, 1727) contains twenty-six essays on various subjects.

⁸ Joseph Colon ben Solomon Trabotto (“Maharik”) (c. 1420–1480), foremost halachic scholar of his era in Italy.

over them, [the acceptance's] strength now is like its strength then, i.e., it is still a covenant made under duress. Also there, in the fields of Moab, He could have overturned a number of mountains and hills over them, or allowed them to wander in the wilderness and not bring them to the Land, but He thought that the first compulsion still stood and did not do so, and so despite their acceptance of the Law in the fields of Moab, they were considered compelled and the caveat of theirs to accept the Law was as in the original state, and see there in Parashat Derachim at length.

עוד כִּתְּבֵנּוּ שֶׁמֶּשֶׁהִקְשָׁה הַרְשֵׁב"א עַל דְּבָרֵי רַז"ל הַדּוֹר קִבְּלוּהָ בִּימֵי אַחְשָׁנָרוּשׁ, שְׂאָם קוֹדֵם אַחְשָׁנָרוּשׁ לֹא הָיוּ מְצוּיִן לְפִי שְׁהָיוּ אֲנוּסִים לְמָה נֶעְנְשׂוּ. וְתִירְצוּ שְׂאָף עַל פִּי שְׁהִיְתָה לָהֶם מוֹדְעָא מְכַל מְקוֹם לֹא נָתַן לָהֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲלֵא דְנֻקָּא כְּדֵי שְׁיִקְיָמוּ הַתּוֹרָה, דְּכַתִּיב וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם אֲרָצוֹת גּוֹיִם בְּעִבּוֹר יִשְׁמְרוּ חֻקָּיו וְכוּ', וּמֵעַתָּה לֹא הִיְתָה לָהֶם טַעֲנַת אוֹנָס וּמוֹדְעָא אֶף עַל פִּי שְׁהָיוּ אֲנוּסִים עַכ"ל וְעֵי"שׁ.

It's also written there in the Parashat Derachim that the Rashba⁹ questions the words of the rabbis of blessed memory that the generation received [the Torah] in the days of Ahasuerus, for if prior to Ahasuerus they were not commanded to observe the Torah because they were compelled, then why were they punished? If you want to say that even though they had a caveat regarding their acceptance of the Law, that even so the Land was given to them only in order that they should fulfil the Torah, as it is written, "He gave them the lands of nations . . . that they may keep His laws" etc. (Ps. 105:44–45), and from now they have no claim of compulsion and a caveat even though they are still under pressure. See there.

וּלְפִי זֶה הַצְּדִיקִים שְׁבָאוֹתוֹ הַדּוֹר אֶפְשָׁר שְׁהָיוּ סוֹבְרִים כְּדַעַת הַתּוֹסְפוֹת וּמַהְרִי"ק שְׁיִשְׁרְאֵל אֵינָם רְאוּיִם לְשׁוּם עוֹנֵשׁ, הוֹאִיל שְׁיִשׁ לָהֶם טַעֲנַת אוֹנָס וּמוֹדְעָא וְאֵינָם חַיִּיבִים בְּקִיּוּם הַתּוֹרָה, וּמִשׁוּם הֵכִי לֹא הוֹכִיחוּ אוֹתָם כְּשִׁרְאוּם עוֹבְרִים עַל הַתּוֹרָה. וְנִהוּ שְׁהִשִּׁיב לוֹ הַקַּב"ה עֲשׂוֹתָהּ הַמְזִימָתָה, שְׁהִנִּיחוּ מְקוֹם לְהַמְזִימָתָה לְהַעֲשׂוֹת וּלְהַתְּרַבּוֹת.

According to this, the righteous of that generation may have been of the opinion of the Tosafot and the Maharik, that the people of Israel were not deserving of any punishment, since they had a claim of compulsion and the caveat and they were not obligated in the commandments, and because of this [the righteous] did not reprove them when they saw them violating the Torah. This is the reason that the Holy One, Blessed be He, answered [to Abraham], "Israel has done so many vile deeds" (Jer. 11:15), that [the righteous] gave [the sinners] room for the vile deeds to be executed and to grow, by not reprovng them.

⁹ Shlomo ben Avraham ibn Aderet (1235–1310), Spanish rabbi, halakhist, and Talmudist.

אָבֵל מִדַּת הַדֵּן קִטְרָגָה לְפִי סִבְרַת הַרְשָׁב"א, שְׂאֵף עַל פִּי שְׁהִיּוּ אֲנוּסִים בְּקַבְּלַת הַתּוֹרָה אֵין לָהֶם מוֹדְעָא, וְהֵם חַיִּיבִים לְשַׁמֹּר אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מִחֲמַת שְׁנִכְנִסוּ לְאַרְץ לְאֶכֹּל מִפְרֵיהָ וּלְשַׁבֹּעַ מִטּוּבָהּ בְּתַנְאֵי גְמוּר וּמְפֹרָשׁ לְקַיִּים הַמְצֻוֹת. וְאִם כֵּן הָיָה לָהֶם לְזַקְנִים לְהוֹכִיחֵם וּלְמַנְעֵם מִהַעֲבִירוֹת, וְהִשְׁתָּא שְׁלֵא הוֹכִיחוּ אוֹתָם בְּמִשְׁפָּט [בּו] א] עִם הַזְּקֵנִים שְׁלֵא מִיחוּ בְּשָׂרִים, כְּדֵאִיתָא הֵתָם בְּמִסְכַּת שְׁבֵת. אַחַר זֶה חֲזַר אַבְרָהָם וְשָׂאֵל אֵף אִם נֶאֱמַר שְׁהַצְדִּיקִים שְׁבָהֶם אֵין בְּהֵם פֶּחַ לְהַצְיִלָם לְפִי שְׁגָם הֵם לֹא עָשׂוּ חוֹבָתָם לְהוֹכִיחַ אֶת בְּנֵי דוֹרָם, מְכַל מְקוֹם הַמִּדַּת הַדֵּין לֹא הָיָה לָהּ רְשׁוּת לְשַׁלוֹט עֲלֵיהֶם מִחֲמַת הַצְּדָקָה שְׁעוֹשִׂים, כְּדֵאִמְרִינָן בְּסִגְוֵי דְרִי מִדָּה אַחַת הָיְתָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם? תִּירָה עַל סְדוּם, דְּאֵילוּ בְּסְדוּם וְנִדְ-עָנִי וְאָבִיוֹן לֹא הִסְזִיקָהּ, וְאֵילוּ בִירוּשָׁלַיִם כְּתִיב דִּי נְשִׂים רַחֲמָנִיּוֹת וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש דף ק"ד.

But despite the view of the righteous that the people of Israel were not deserving of punishment, **the attribute of strict justice spoke against them, according to the opinion of the Rashba. That is, even though they were compelled in their acceptance of the Torah, they did not have a caveat, and they were obligated to observe the Torah because they entered into the Land, “to eat of its fruits and to be satiated from its goodness,”¹⁰ with the complete and explained condition to fulfill the mitzvot. If so, the elders needed to admonish them and prevent them from sinning, and since they didn’t admonish them, “ ‘The L-rd will enter into judgment against the elders of His people and its princes’ (Isaiah 3:14)? If the princes sinned [by committing robbery], how did the elders sin? Rather, say the elders [were punished] because they did not protest [the sins of] the princes.” This is brought there in tractate Shabbat (54b–55a). After this, Abraham again asked if it was said that the righteous—who lacked the power to save [the people] because they did not do their duty to admonish the members of their generation—in any case the attribute of strict justice had no permission to rule over them because of the charity that they gave. As it says in tractate Sanhedrin:**

With regard to Sodom, it is written, “Then the L-rd rained upon Sodom [brimstone and fire from the L-rd out of Heaven]” (Gen. 19:24), while with regard to Jerusalem, it is written: “From above He has sent fire into my bones, and it prevails against them” (Lam. 1:13). And it is written, “For the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the sin of Sodom” (Lam. 4:6). Is there partiality in the matter [i.e., why wasn’t Jerusalem then overturned like Sodom]? Rava says that Rabbi Yochanan says: It is because **there was an additional measure of suffering in Jerusalem that was not in Sodom, as with regard to Sodom it is written:** “Behold this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom; pride, surfeit of bread [and careless ease was in her and in her daughters]; **and yet she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and destitute**” (Ezek. 16:49). [I.e., while the people of Sodom did not give to the poor, it was out of choice, for they had plenty of food.] In contrast, **with regard to Jerusalem it is written: “The hands of compassionate women cooked their own children”** (Lam. 4:10). The residents of Jerusalem were punished with a great famine.

- Sanhedrin 104b

¹⁰ Berachot 44a: the blessing over grains, wine, and fruits.

ומי שנותן הצדקה נקרא [א] טוב כדאמרין בקידושין אמרו צדיק כייטוב וכי יש צדיק שאינו טוב, אלא טוב לשמים ולבריות זהו צדיק טוב. ואלו היו נקראים טובים ולא צדיקים, משום דלגבי קב"ה לא היו צדיקים שהיו בעלי עבירות, ולגבי הבריות היו טובים לפי שהיו עושים צדקה, וכבר ידוע גודל מעלת הצדקה כי רבה היא, כדאמרין במדרש על פסוק השקיפה ממעון קדשך, בא וראה כמה גדול כח הצדקה שמהפכת מדת הדין למדת הרחמים, שהרי כל השקפה שבתורה היא לרעה חוץ מזו, ללמדך שגדול כח מתנת עניים שמהפכת מדת הרועז למדת הרחמים.

One who gives charity is called “good,” as it says in tractate Kiddushin (40a), “ ‘Speak of the righteous, who is good, for they shall eat the fruit of their actions’ (Isaiah 3:10). But is there a righteous person who is good and is there a righteous person who is not good? Rather, one who is good toward Heaven and toward people is a righteous person who is good, while one who is good toward Heaven but bad toward people is a righteous person who is not good!” But these people about whom Abraham asked are called good but not righteous, because as far as [the] Holy One, Blessed be He is concerned, they are not righteous if they are engaging in sins, but as far as the people are concerned, they are good because they give charity. We already know the greatness of the level of charity, which is indeed great, as it says in the midrash Tanchuma (Ki Tisa 14) on the verse, “Look down from your holy abode” (Deut. 26:15). Come and see the great power of charity, which reverses the attribute of strict justice to the attribute of mercy, for every appearance of the Hiphil form of the word “look forth” that is in the Torah is for a negative connotation, except for this verse Deut. 26:15 in the section dealing with the giving of tithes, to teach you that great is the power of giving to the poor, which reverses the attribute of anger to the attribute of mercy.¹¹

¹¹ Midrash Tanchuma (Ki Tisa 14): “R. Alexandri said: The influence of those who bring tithes is so great that they can convert a curse into a blessing. Whenever Scripture employs the word *hashkafah* (‘looking forth’) it is an expression indicating disaster, as it is said: ‘And he *looked forth* toward Sodom’ (Gen. 19:28); ‘The L-rd *looked forth* upon the hosts of the Egyptians’ (Ex. 14:24); ‘Through the window she *looked forth* and peered’ (Judges 5:28); ‘And there *looked forth* toward him two or three officers’ (II Kings 9:32); ‘For at the window of my house I *looked forth* through my lattice; and I beheld among the thoughtless ones’ (Prov. 7:6). The word ‘looking forth’ connotes a disaster in every instance except in the verse ‘*Look forth* from Your holy habitation from Heaven, and bless Your people Israel’ (Deut. 26:15). Not only does it not indicate disaster [in that verse], but [those who bring tithe] convert the disaster into a blessing.”

וְנָהוּ שְׂאֵמֶר אֲבָרְהָם הִנֵּה לָךְ לְהִסְתַּכֵּל בְּטוֹבִים שְׂבָהֶם, דְּהֵינּוּ מִחֲמַת הַצְּדָקָה שְׁעוֹשִׂים הִנֵּה לָךְ לַעֲכָב מִדַּת הַדִּין וְלִהְגַּבִּיר מִדַּת הַרַחֲמִים וְהַחֲסָד. וְהַשִּׁיב לוֹ הַקַּב"ה סוּגְיָהוּן בִּישִׁין דְּהֵינּוּ אַף עַל פִּי שְׂבָפְרָטוֹת מִצְוֹת הַצְּדָקָה יֵשׁ לָךְ כֹּחַ לְהַגִּין, מְכַל מְקוֹם מִצַּד הַכְּלָלוֹת אֵין לָךְ כֹּחַ זֶה. וְאֲדַרְבָּא בְּכָלְלוֹתָם נִקְרְאוּ רַעִים וְלֹא טוֹבִים, מְשׁוּם דִּקְרָא פְּתִיב צְדָקָה תְּרוֹמֶם-גּוֹי וְחֲסָד לְאֻמִּים חֲטָאת, וּפִירֵשׁ הַפְּרָשַׁת דְּרָכִים בְּדִירוּשׁ [בְּדִרְיָשָׁה] הַצְּדָקָה כְּנִגְדַּת הַמְּקַבְּלִים, שְׁנִדְנָקָא כְּשְׁעוֹשִׂים הַצְּדָקָה עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל נְהֻשְׁבַּת הַצְּדָקָה לְמִצְוָה, לְפִי שְׂהֵם קְרוּיִים בְּנִים, אֲבָל הַצְּדָקָה וְחֲסָד הַנְּעֻשָׂה עִם הָאוּמוֹת הוּא לְחֲטָאת, מְשׁוּם שְׂהֵם קְרוּיִים עֲבָדִים עַכ"ל.

This is why Abraham said, “You should look at the good among them!” That is, as if to say, “Because of the charity that they gave, You should prevent the attribute of strict justice from reaching them and instead strengthen the attribute of mercy and kindness.” The Holy One, Blessed be He, answered him, “The great majority of them are bad,” as if to say, “Even though the coins given for the mitzvah of charity have the power to protect the giver, in any case, there is no such power when it comes to the charity given by the general population, who are not giving it as a mitzvah. To the contrary, the majority of the people are called bad and not good, because, as it is written in Scripture, “Charity will elevate a nation [i.e., Israel]; but the kindness of the nations is sin” (Prov. 14:34).¹² In Bava Batra 10b, the rabbis explain this to mean that the nations have ulterior motives, such as to boast about their generosity, or to taunt Israel, or to ensure the permanence of their kingdoms. Alternatively, the rabbis translate the last word not as sin, but as a sin offering, and interpret the sentence as meaning that the nations intend their acts of kindness as a balance to their sins. Rashi’s comment is that the “kindness” of the nations is that they rob from one person to give to another. Ibn Ezra explains that the “kindness” that the nations do is in honor of their idol worship.¹³ **The Parashat Derachim explains (in the 17th essay) in requiring the giving of charity versus willingly accepting the obligation to give charity, that especially when the Jewish people willingly gives charity, that the charity is then considered a mitzvah, because they are called “sons.” I.e., when we are at our best, expressing our love for Torah, we are considered as children of G-d, and our good deeds are considered acts of love and are considered by G-d to be mitzvot. **In contrast, the charity and kindness done by the nations are considered as a sin, because they are called “servants.”** I.e., the nations don’t have the Torah, and thus are considered as the servants of G-d; if they engage in charity and kindness, it is done for an ulterior motive, and is not viewed favorably by G-d.**

¹² The word *chesed* (חֶסֶד) typically means kindness or faithfulness. There is a rare meaning, “shame,” as in Lev. 20:17, and the Jewish Publication Society edition of 1917 interprets Prov. 14:34 as “Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.” Most Jewish commentators, however, interpret Prov. 14:34 as “. . . the kindness of the nations is sin.” That leads one to question why that would be so, which is addressed further in the text.

¹³ Similarly, see Isaiah 66:17: “Those who devise a holiness and purity for themselves, turning towards the gardens, going after ‘the one’ in the midst . . . they shall come to an end all together, says the L-rd.” Rashi’s interpretation is that they were going out to worship idols that they had erected in the garden. Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch suggests that they were worshipping Nature. Regardless, while such people may have considered themselves holy and pure, their actions were idolatrous and therefore a grave sin.

ומעתה לפי סברת ישראל שבאותו הדור שקבלת התורה אינה נקראת קבלה לפי שהיתה באונס, גם הם אינם קרויים בנים וצדיקין לא יצאו מקלל בני נח, ונהרי הם כמו שאר האומות שעליהם כתיב וחסד לאמים חטאת, וזהו סוגיהו בישין.

Now according to the position of Israel—that in the same generation that received the Torah it should not be called “receipt” because they were compelled—they also aren’t called sons, i.e., Jews who don’t have a love for the Torah won’t be considered as children of G-d, and any “good deeds” won’t be considered as acts of love or as mitzvot. However, they still are not exempted from the category of the “sons of Noah,” and they are like the remaining nations upon whom it is written “the kindness of the nations is sin” (Prov. 14:34); this is the reason for G-d’s reproach to Abraham that “the great majority of them are bad.”

ועל זה שאל אברהם איך אפשר שיהיו נחשבים כשאר האומות, שהרי יש להם המילה שמעידה עליהם שהם ישראל, אמר ליה סידך כפרו בה. ולא די שכפרו במילה עצמה אלא כפרו נמי ברמז וסוד המילה, דהיינו השלום דכתיב הנני נתן לו את בריתי שלום, שהיו אלו שמחתו במפלתו של אלו, שאם היה ביניהם השלום לא היתה יכולה מדת הדין לפגוע בהם, כדאמרינן בירושלמי דפיאה דורו של אהאב שהיו עובדים עבודה זרה היו יוצאים למלחמה ונוצחים בשביל שהיה ביניהם השלום.

Upon this answer, Abraham asked how it was possible that they would be considered as the remainder of the nations, as they have a covenant [of circumcision] that informs them that they are Israel. [G-d] said to him, “By your life! They nullified that.” It’s not enough that they nullified the covenant itself, but also the allegory and esoteric secret of the covenant, that is to say, peace, as it is written, “I grant him my covenant of peace” (Num. 25:12), for they were happy about each other’s misfortune. If there had been peace between them, the attribute of strict justice would not have been able to harm them, as it says in the Jerusalem Talmud in Peah (4b) that the generation of Ahab were idol worshippers, but they went out to war and were victorious, because they had peace among themselves.

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