

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Vayera 5785

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Avraham pleads for the fate of Sodom.

אוֹלֵי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר הַזֶּה תִּסָּפֵה וְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לְמַקֹּום לְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים
הַצְדִּיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ:

“Perhaps there are fifty righteous individuals within the city. Shall You even sweep it all away and not uplift the place? For the sake of fifty righteous that are within her?” (Bereishis 18:24).

The conversation between Avraham and Hashem is very interesting and puzzling. Avraham does not request the cities be saved outright. He does not even ask for the opportunity to go there and beg them to repent. Hashem sent many prophets to places to ask them to repent. Yermiahu, Yishayahu, and Tzephaniah were sent to Yerushalayim, Amos, Micha, Eliyahu, and Hoshea were sent to the kings of northern Yisroel, and Yechezkel spoke to the people in Bavel and Yerushalayim. Even Yonah and Nachum were sent to Ninveh, the gentile city, to tell them to repent on two different occasions. Yet, Hashem does not give Avraham the opportunity here to get Sodom to repent. Why? Further, why does Avraham choose fifty people? Also, why are the words “tzadikim” written all without the second yud?

The specific wording of the pasukim here give clues as to the request by Avraham. It is important, though, to first know what was being destroyed and what Avraham was asking from Hashem. Sodom was the mother city of a metropolitan area that included five cities; it was Sodom, Amora, Adma, and Tzeboim. (Ibid 10:19). Then a fifth city, Bela – later renamed to Tzoar – was added to it. (Ibid 14:2). Further, as Moshe tells Bnei Yisroel, four cities were destroyed with the Sodom destruction. (Devarim 29:22). The fifth city, Tzohar, was saved by Lot. (Bereishis 19:21).

Avraham brings up that he is dust of the earth, only upon his second request. (Ibid 18:27). What prompted this show of humility in his second request? Avraham’s request was fifty righteous people within the city, the entire metropolitan area itself. The first request says “within the city,” (Ibid 18:24), and that word is used in the Torah to mean “among.” (See Ibid 40:20 and 42:5). The second request says “perhaps the fifty righteous lacks five, will You destroy the entire metropolis for lack of five?” (Ibid 18:28). Avraham was asking now if for want of five people would entire metropolitan area be destroyed. Then when Avraham goes down from forty to thirty to twenty to ten, he seems to be asking if one of the surrounding cities had these numbers – ten per city – would that be enough to save the entire five large cities. Even one city containing enough righteous should be enough to save all five. However, there is more to his request.

However, Avraham asking for a quorum of ten for each city does not seem to add up. He initially asks for fifty, anywhere within Sodom. Fifty in one city would have saved

all five cities, even if the other cities had none. (Ibid 18:29). Also, Lot was able to save Tzoar even though he was just three people. Further, if the calculation is that Noach was unable to save the entire world with eight people, it is not a kal-vachomer (fortiori argument) because saving the world would require more people than just a few cities.

The word "tzadikim" is mentioned six times in chumash. It is mentioned another fifty-one times in the rest of Tanakh. In the entirety of nach, only one time is "tzadikim" missing the second yud. Yet, in the Chumash it is spelled without the second yud five times. The exception is, "You shall not take bribes...it twists upside down the words of the righteous." (Shmos 23:8). When it refers to righteous people in civil matters, or secular jurists, then it is without a yud. In Shmos the pasuk refers to someone bringing matters up in the civil or criminal law of the Torah. Thus, the subject tazdik has the second yud.

Avraham mentioned righteous without a yud because he was referring to righteous gentiles, or those that were righteous adjacent. By the time Avraham approached Hashem to make his requests, Avraham already sent the messengers to go save Lot. (Bereishis 18:22). He tasked two of the men that came to visit him to go to Sodom and warn Lot of the impending destruction. (Ibid 19:1). Avraham knew that Lot had eight in his family; Lot, his wife, two sons-in-law, two married daughters, and two unmarried daughters. Together with the messengers that made ten. This was the number he was working towards.

Another lesson learned from the yud placement is that the "righteousness" referred to by Avraham had to do with judgments and bribes. Avraham was asking if there were fifty righteous judges or justices within Sodom. That would be enough to save the city, as ultimately, justice would prevail. Avraham tells Hashem that to kill righteous and wicked alike is unjust. (Ibid 18:25). Avraham knew he had ten in Sodom. Perhaps there was another group of ten for each other city. Initially, he not only wanted to save the people but the cities themselves. Hashem agrees to save the "makom" place. (Ibid 18:26). Avraham had talked about "makom," too. (Ibid 18:24). Then Avraham switches tact, asking if forty-five will be enough to save them. Then all the way down to ten. He was asking that not only Lot be saved but any other righteous person be saved, too. Avraham uses the term "dust and ashes." Dust refers to Adam being formed from dust. (Ibid 2:7). Ashes refers to the Pact of the Parts (bris bein habisarim), or the ashes of Noach's offering when he left the ark. Avraham reminds Hashem, that Hashem formed man and He made pacts with man. Hashem may destroy evil but good people should be spared. Hashem agrees, to the last man, to the ten Hashem did try to save. (Lot's sons-in-law laughed, kept their wives back, too, and Lot's wife turned around).

The cities still had to be destroyed, but the righteous would not be destroyed along with the evil ones. Yet, only Lot and his daughters escaped unharmed. Lot was even able to request that an entire city survive because of him. It could also be that because there were ten at the outset that Tzoar was saved when Lot asked. Avraham did not want to start with ten because he could not ask for more after that. He went from fifty down to his last position, ten. Then Hashem went to destroy and Avraham returned to his place. (Ibid 18:33).