

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

And Hashem said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous people in the midst of the city, then I will forgive the entire place for their sake.” (18:26)

Someone once asked Rabbi Avigdor Miller: “If Hashem was willing to save Sodom if ten good people could be found, or two in each town, then why didn’t He save those towns in Europe where at least two or ten righteous people lived?” Rabbi Miller said, “The answer is, you must understand what Hashem and Avraham were arguing about. It states that if there will be found ‘ten tzaddikim in the midst of the city’ – why doesn’t it just say ‘in the city’? The answer is, if you have righteous people who are hiding in their houses, they are righteous

but nobody knows about them, that wouldn’t save them. No. They have to go out in the midst of the city. And they have to fight the city, they have to buck, they have to show opposition to the city, that’s ‘in the midst of the city.’ Like it says, ‘And to Jerusalem Your city may You return in mercy, and dwell in its midst as You spoke.’ What does it mean, ‘in its midst’? It doesn’t mean that the Shechina should be there invisible, it’s there invisible now, too. The Shechina should show itself. That’s what we want, that the Shechina should demonstrate itself.

The Shechina should dwell openly in its midst. Now, Hashem said, ‘Yes, if you show Me ten people who went out in the street and protested when Sodom made a law against welcoming wayfarers, then I’ll save the city for their sake.’ Ten people who protest are very hard to find. In Europe you didn’t have so many people who would come out and fight openly. You had frum Jews, like we’re frum Jews, but we don’t fight back. We sit quietly in our shtiblach, in our shuls, we don’t fight back. Where’s our opposition that we show to the wicked?” (Tape 288)

On 6 Elul 5717 (1957) the Satmar Rebbe organized a demonstration against religious persecution in Eretz Yisroel, in Union Square in Manhattan. Several days before the demonstration, members of the Agudas Harabbanim came to the Rebbe to convince him to change his mind and not make such a demonstration before the eyes of the gentile world. The Rebbe said, “Look at the Ibn Ezra in Parshas Vayeira. He notes that the Torah says Sodom would be saved for the sake of tzaddikim who are in the midst of the city, and he explains, ‘This means that they fear Hashem in public.’ So we see that the problem in Sodom was that the tzaddikim among them were afraid to publicize their opinions in the streets of the city.” After this the rabbanim had nothing to say, and they left. On the way out, one said to the others, “I can’t believe it! I have been learning the Ibn Ezra for many years, but I forgot about that comment.” (Toros Ve’uvdos Mibeis Raboseinu, p. 27.)



And Avraham rose early in the morning, to the place where he had stood before Hashem. (19:27)

The Gemora (Chullin 91b) learns from this verse that a Torah scholar must not go out alone at night, because of the evil spirits. This is why Avraham waited till the morning to go out and pray for the city of Sodom. Tosafos

explains, “He went to pray concerning the destruction of Sodom, which took place in the morning, and he should have prayed earlier, at night. But he did not want to go out alone at night. He was going alone to pray for them, and he

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did not want any person to be present during the prayer.” Why was it so important that no one be present to watch Avraham pray for Sodom? The Satmar Rav explained, “Avraham was going to offer arguments in favor of the wicked people of Sodom. This prayer was directed only at Hashem, but no person was allowed to hear it, lest he think that Avraham’s arguments represented the real truth, and thus be led astray after the people of Sodom. We see from this a great principle – that in private with the Holy One, blessed is He, everyone is permitted to speak in favor of the wicked, saying that they are much better than the gentiles, and so on. But when speaking to people, Heaven forbid to try to find redeeming qualities

in them! Rather, we must expose them and put the blame on them, so that Jews should know to keep far from them.” (Toros V’uvdos Mibeis Raboseinu, p. 25)

It should be noted that even in tefillah, there must be both elements: blaming the wicked, and arguing in their favor. We learn this from the Mechilta in Parshas Bo (brought by Yalkut Shimoni Yirmiyah 325), which contrasts the three prophets Eliyahu, Yonah and Yirmiyah. Eliyahu, when speaking to Hashem, had only bad things to say about the Jewish people (Melachim I 19:10). Therefore Hashem did not want him anymore as a prophet (ibid. verse 16). Yonah went to the other extreme: he was so concerned about the welfare of his people that he refused to obey Hashem’s command. So his career as a prophet was ended as well. “Hashem spoke to Yonah a second time” – but not a third time. But Yirmiyah combined both elements when he said (Eicha 3:42), “We were sinful and rebellious; You did not forgive.” He admitted the sins, but at the same time he argued that Hashem should forgive them.



And she said to Avraham, “Send away this maidservant and her child, for the child of this maidservant will not inherit together with my son, with Yitzchak.” (21:10)

The Chofetz Chaim said: There is no doubt that had Yishmael been brought up together with Yitzchak, he would not have become such a “wild one among men,” for a person’s environment has a great impact on him. But since Yishmael’s company could have been a bad influence on Yitzchak, Sarah decided that the danger to Yitzchak was more important. And who knew if before Yitzchak would have a chance to make Yishmael better, Yishmael would ruin Yitzchak? So she told Avraham to send Yishmael away, and Hashem told Avraham to follow her counsel. “The actions of the fathers are a sign for the children,” and so we learn from this to keep good children and bad children apart, lest the bad influence the good. “If you pour hot water and cold water together, the hot water gets cooler.” (Chofetz

Chaim on the Torah)

In the late 30’s when some proposed that Agudath Israel join the Zionist Vaad Haleumi, Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman wrote a letter against it, in which he quoted his rebbe, the Chofetz Chaim: “As to the suggestion to join the Vaad Haleumi, the law is well known that one may not join such people even for the sake of a mitzvah (Yalkut Shimoni Yehoshua 3, Orchos Tzaddikim Shaar 5), and I have nothing to add to this. But you must tell those who agree to this proposition that they are causing the multitudes to sin and desecrating the Name of Hashem... And if they imagine that their opinions will be given equal weight, this is the counsel of the evil inclination, for we must remember the great difference between the

religious and the irreligious: the irreligious are completely irreligious, but the religious are not completely religious, for within every one of us there is a certain amount of irreligiosity – this I heard from the holy author of Chofetz Chaim, of blessed memory – and therefore if the numbers are equal, the decision will always be made in favor of the irreligious.

“I also heard the following [from the Chofetz Chaim]: Chaggai the Prophet tested the kohanim and said, ‘If a man holds holy meat in the corner of his garment and touches bread, soup, wine, oil or any food, will it become holy?’ And they said, no. ‘And if one defiled by a dead body touches any of these, will it become defiled?’ And they said, yes. And Chaggai said, ‘So is this people

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and so is this nation before me, said Hashem.’ (Chaggai 2:12-14) The Gemora derives many halachos from these verses, but the simple meaning is also true: one who touches the holy does not become holy, but one who touches defilement becomes defiled.

“If the irreligious agree that we should join them, then we must know and understand that they are spreading a net to catch souls, and who is foolish enough to walk into their trap? Certainly if the tzaddik Reb Chaim Zonenfeld were alive now, they would never have made this suggestion, but since we are left orphans, everyone wants power.

“I remember five years ago the suggestion was made that the Agudah join the [Zionist] Agency, since the heads of the Joint who were supporting all the yeshivos wanted this, and it was hard to say no to them. At that time I heard from the holy [Chofetz Chaim], of blessed memory: ‘Better a third of Torah learning should stop, rather than join them.’” This means that even if most of the yeshivos will have to close down, Heaven forbid, this is not a good enough reason to join them.” (Kovetz Maamarim V’igros, p. 154)

It seems that Rashi means David ben Yishai literally: that during his reign he would try to destroy the nations that would one day rule over the Jewish people. But we do not find that King David fought any nations besides the ones in his immediate surroundings – the Phillistines, the Amonites, the Aramites and so on. The nations that subjugated the Jewish people in exile – Bavel, Madai, Yavan, and Rome – were not powerful at that time. Furthermore, why should King David have thought that by fighting the nations in his time, he would prevent the Jewish people from going into exile years later? Surely David knew that if they would someday deserve exile,

Hashem would find a nation to carry out the task of exiling them. The Torah warns, “Hashem will bring upon you a nation from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you do not understand.”

The Abarbanel explains that Rashi means not King David, but his descendant, the moshiach. Moshiach will come and try to destroy the nations, but Hashem will not let him until the time comes. Actually, preventing moshiach from coming too early was Avraham’s own initiative. In the Abarbanel’s own words: “Avraham foresaw the length of this exile and the great misfortunes it brought, and he feared that his descendants would rise up to leave the exile before the time set by Hashem, just as the children of Ephraim left the Egyptian exile before the time, whereupon Hashem became angry at them and killed thousands of their best. So Avraham, knowing the time of the End, chased away the birds - the son of David - preventing them from coming down on the carcasses - the nations - until evening, i.e. the time of redemption and the end of exile, as it says, ‘And at the time of evening there will be light.’

“And there is no doubt that it was in reference to this that Shlomo said (Shir Hashirim 2:7), ‘I have adjured you, daughters of Jerusalem, with the deer and the hinds of the field, that you not awaken nor arouse the love before it desires.’ And in Kesubos 111a, ‘Rabbi Yossi bar Chanina said: To what to these three oaths refer? One, that Israel should not go up as a wall. One, that the Holy One, blessed is He, adjured Israel not to rebel against the nations of the world. One, that the Holy One, blessed is He, adjured the nations not to subjugate Israel too much.’ The prohibition on ‘rebellious against the nations’ means that we must bear the yoke of the exile and live under them until the time of the End, when they will pass on. And this is what the prophet Tzefaniah meant when he said (3:8), ‘Therefore wait for Me, said Hashem, for the day when I arise,’ i.e. He commands them to wait until the time of the End, and not rebel and leave the exile before the time set by Him.” (Yeshuos Meshicho v. 1, p. 11b)

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