

A Taste of Torah Understanding Sodom

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Sodom. Paradigm of depravity, the cruelty of this city has become the epitome of evil for all time. Sodom's overarching characteristic was their absolute revulsion of kindness of any sort. So much so, that when a young girl - Lot's daughter - was caught giving food to a pauper, she was murdered in a most horrendous fashion.

But nothing develops in a vacuum, and Sodom is no exception. What was the mindset and philosophy of the citizenry? From whence sprung forth their abhorrence of kindness?

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1944/1945-2001) sheds light on the enigma that is Sodom. Sodomites were aware that G-d runs the world, and, if a person has a tough lot in life, it is because G-d wills it to be that way. If a human were to attempt to improve the plight of an unfortunate, he is, in effect, meddling with G-d's plans! What an awful thing to do! Thus began a philosophy of ignoring the plight of others and leaving them to their G-d given destiny.

Of course, it was all downhill from there. Once this approach was adopted, it rapidly became a *weltanschauung* of selfishness and self-centeredness which soon degenerated into sheer cruelty and outright barbarism towards others.

But we are left with one question:

Ask the Rabbi Money Talks

From: Manny in Austin, TX

Dear Rabbi,

With all the discussion on the causes of the current financial crisis I can't help but wonder if there aren't additional reasons going on behind the scenes. Can you offer any insight into

Why are they wrong? They seem to have a valid point: If G-d made it this way, why should I mess around with it?

Our Patriarch Avraham answers this question. The absolute antithesis of Sodom (though he prayed for them, nonetheless), Avraham's worldview was that G-d placed man in this world precisely for the purpose of improving it. Man's purpose is not to sit tight and do nothing while the world spins merrily on its way, but, rather, to perfect the world - and all that inhabits it - through the performance of mitzvos and acts of loving-kindness. To be sure, one must have a constant awareness that it is G-d who creates, orchestrates, and sustains the world, and one must realize humanity's insignificance vis-à-vis G-d's omniscience and omnipotence. Often, it is necessary - nay, required - to cease all attempts at bettering what one perceives to be an unjust situation and admit that it is G-d's will that such a scenario exist in the world, despite our inability to comprehend it. At times, we try to help another, but are met with failure. Our halachic obligations may stand in the way of improving the lot of a less fortunate individual. At these junctures we must bow our heads before G-d's will. But whenever possible, it is our obligation, as the descendants of Avraham, to better the lot of others.

this aspect of the crisis?

Dear Manny,

Contrary to popular belief, I am not a prophet. Nor do I wish to be apocalyptic. However, insofar as Judaism posits that G-d runs the world, and that things that happen are often directly

Stories For The Soul

Put to the Test

The president of a successful multi-million dollar corporation with hundreds of employees was once asked the secret to his success.

"That's easy," he replied, "I give an aptitude test to all the employees. Then I look it over. If, for example, I see a person did well on the intelligence test, I give him a thinking job.

"If someone proves to be personable, he gets a job dealing with people. If someone is organized, I give him a managerial job. Someone creative will get a job in the planning department, or in research and development.

"This is the secret of the success of our company. Everyone gets the job for which he is suited. In that way he can use his potential and develop it.

"The trick," he concluded, "is to discover a person's talents and put him in a situation where he is tested. He will excel, which is good for him and good for the company."

Avraham Avinu was tested by Hashem ten times. Each test taxed Avraham to the limit, and each time Avraham passed.

Hashem is the World's Best Boss. He knows us inside and out. He has given us a job perfectly suited for our talents. Each of us undergoes trials and tribulations. There is much wisdom to how each of us is tested in our lives. When Hashem gives us a test, we are guaranteed that we have the ability to handle it and to pass it with flying colors.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Baruch Lederman.

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Kollel Happenings

RABBI DOVID SCHUSTAL, DEAN OF BETH MEDRASH GOVOHA OF LAKEWOOD, NJ IN DENVER

The Kollel is bringing Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Schustal, Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Beth Medrash Govoha, the largest yeshiva in America, to Denver on Sunday, October 28th. Take advantage of the opportunity to meet Torah greatness. For more details, visit the Kollel website, www.denverkollel.org, or contact info@denverkollel.org



SAVE THE DATE! WOMEN'S WELLNESS WORKSHOP NOV 11TH

Join The Women's Division of the Denver Community Kollel for an event you don't want to miss! Learn how to achieve health of mind, body and soul at the Denver Jewish Women's Wellness Workshop Sunday, November 11th, from 10 am to 2 pm. More details to follow. For more info, contact Esti Schwab at esti@denverkollel.org or at 303-668-1878.



FLAWLESS GEMS? THE ETHICS OF BLOOD DIAMONDS AT TORAH FOR TYCOONS NOVEMBER 7TH

Join J.J. Slatkin, General Manager of (space added) Jay Feder Jewelers, and Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab, Dean of the Denver Community Kollel, as they cut into this multi-faceted issue. Wednesday, November 7th, 12-1 pm at the East Side Kosher Deli \$20. For more information or to register contact the Kollel at 303-820-2855 or info@denverkollel.org.

Interpersonal Issues Returning a Lost Object

The notices need to remain posted for a period of time sufficient to assume that most people in the local vicinity have seen it. It is preferable, though, to leave them up for as long as possible.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

continued from front

related to what people do, there might be a connection between our attitude toward money and wealth and what's happened with the world economy.

Of course, there are real, tangible reasons and explanations for what's happened. And as you say, that's what everyone is talking about. Also, in considering the possible spiritual reasons behind the scenes, the key is to view them as what you correctly label "additional" reasons (although they might still be primary). This means one should not be divorced from the reality of the situation, nor should one lose touch with the human element, and should have empathy for those who have lost.

That being said, the Torah position on money is that wealth is a gift from G-d independent of one's effort or economic acumen. One person may be very original, astute and hard working and never amass much wealth, whereas another might not have much of these talents yet be very successful. Regardless, a person must view his financial success (or lack thereof) as coming from G-d. The corollary of this is that the wealth which one has must be used according to the will of the One who bestowed it. For this reason people are expected to be charitable, provide for the needy and in some cases give up to 20 percent of their net income to charity.

In our modern, materially oriented world, global obsession with wealth and financial success may have blinded mankind to the purpose of wealth, namely to be cognizant of G-d, express our gratitude to Him and to generously share wealth with the less fortunate.

Not to proclaim, "By my strength and through the power of my own hands have I acquired all this", but rather "To G-d is the glory, the grandeur, the success, and the splendor". We must view the act of giving as a privilege, an honor and even as a gift itself - "the gift of giving".

It is my (perhaps naïve) opinion that the early founders of America had all this in mind with the decision to inscribe "In G-d We Trust" on the money of the United States. The point is clear: Despite America's wealth of natural resources and the resourcefulness of the early American spirit, it was stated unabashedly with the intention to inculcate to all - it is to G-d whom we pray and in G-d whom we place our trust for financial success. (Ironically, among the multitude of ways that Israel mimics America, this is not one of them.)

Unfortunately, over time, in the United States and internationally, we have lost sight of this humble yet very powerful creed which has greatly been replaced with egotistical consumption, vice and greed. Perhaps the root of the crisis, then, is G-d's repudiation of our trust in money rather than in Him. Perhaps in replacing the motto "In G-d We Trust" with "For Money We Lust", by indulging in unnecessary luxuries while others lack the bare necessities, we have forfeited His blessing such that the money upon which we lean has started to crumble. Maybe we need to feel more acutely the precariousness of the needy, to give more to others and to put our mouths where our money is by sincerely proclaiming: In G-d We Trust!

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