



FROM THE MAHARAL'S *DERECH HACHAIM* AND THE RAMBAN

Not a Taker, Not a Giver

"SODOM." THE NAME CONJURES UP IMAGES of a most decadent society. A society in which injustice was justice. A society that punished the innocent while rewarding the guilty. A society that has the dubious honor of having its very name baked into the etymology of some of the most depraved acts that people can perform. A cursory glance at the Talmud (Sanhedrin 109a-b) will reveal that the fine citizens of this upstanding society held the gold standard for what debauchery could and should be.

But we are left to wonder: How did such a society emerge in the first place?

A major clue may be gleaned from the following Mishnah:

There are four personality types among people: One who says, "What's mine is mine, and what's yours is yours;" this is an average type of person—but some say that this attitude was the hallmark of Sodom... (Avos 5:13)

The question that bothers many commentators is this: Bottom line, what is this trait? Is it middle-of-the-road, or is it the hallmark of Sodom? In other words, if one lives by this creed, is he regarded as normal or is he compared to someone from one of the most immoral societies ever known? (It is an extreme difference, don't you agree?)

The Maharal (in *Derech Chaim*) explains that this trait can run either way; it just depends on what fuels it. The

critical distinction is which part of the statement is the cause, and therefore more important, and which is the effect—is your property yours because mine is mine, or is mine mine because yours is yours?

Someone who isn't interested in benefiting from others will live by the creed, "What's yours is yours—don't offer me anything—because 'one who hates gifts will live.'"*

* Mishlei 15:27

It is a sign of piety not to accept gifts, but rather to trust in God to provide enough for his needs, as it is written,* "One who hates gifts will live." (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 249:5)

However, the potential pitfall of this pious person is the second half of the equation (the product of his principles!)—"Since what's yours is to remain yours, *that which is mine should remain mine.*" He may come to see himself as a self-made man; he didn't ask for handouts, so neither should anyone

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FROM *DARASH MOSHE*, BY RAV MOSHE FEINSTEIN

Praying for Whom?

Avraham approached and said, "Will You even wipe out the righteous along with the wicked?" (18:23)

IT IS AMAZING THAT AVRAHAM PRAYED AT all and attempted to intercede on Sodom's behalf. After all, this was a society that stood for the exact opposite of everything that Avraham was trying to achieve; what right did they have to continue to exist? But then couple that with the fact that Avraham kept on praying and praying, even though he was rebuffed several times. How was he able to do it?

The answer is that our question is based on a flawed premise. Even among naturally kind people, at the end of the

day their kindness stems from just that—their nature. But upon meeting someone who threatens the values they hold dear, they automatically go into attack mode.

However, Avraham's signature trait was *not* simply his natural personality. It stemmed from the one True Root, the Torah. So he did not desire Sodom's destruction. He hoped that they would repent, so that they too could serve Hashem properly.

An obvious lesson we should draw from this is to ask ourselves: Are our intentions for G-d's sake, or are they really for ourselves, disguised as for His? If we answer this question honestly, many of our frustrations with other people will likely, magically, disappear.

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Every Day

👏👏 “Dirshu” Gemara Shiur

(Maseches Sota)

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....

Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM

Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

👏👏 Kollel Yisgaber K’ari

(amud-a-day of Mishnah B’rurah)

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....

Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

👏👏 Kitzur Shuchan Aruch

Live video conference!

Rabbi Dani Schon.....

Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

👏 Daf Yomi

Rabbi Meir Minster.....

Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM

Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

👏👏 Nightly Halacha Chabura

Rabbis Dani Schon

& Binyamin Teitelbaum.....

Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

Chavrusa Learning

(private & small groups).....times vary

Sunday *Free brunch!*

👏👏 America Runs on Torah

(Jewish Law & Parasha)

Rabbis Dani Schon

and Yisroel Kaufman.....10 AM

Grand Deluxe breakfast served

Tuesday

👏 Mishnah

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....8:10–9 PM

👏👏 Partners in Torah at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

👏👏 Around the Table

(Parasha & Pirkei Avos)

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9 PM

Wednesday

👏👏 Torah Treasures for

Seniors at the Mayerson JCC

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....10:30–11:15 AM

👏👏 Downtown Lunch-n-Learn at Strauss & Troy

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....12–1 PM

Thursday

👏👏 Halacha (based on the parasha)

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM

Homemade refreshments served.

Minyanim for Standard Time

Shacharis

Sunday.....8:15 AM

On Sundays when the Kollel is not

in session, Shacharis is at 8 AM

Monday–Friday.....7:20 AM

Mincha

Sunday.....1:15 PM

Mon.–Thurs. thru January.....2:30 PM

Sun.–Thurs., Feb.–Mar.....5:45 PM

Shabbos.....2:40 PM

Ma’ariv

In the Beis Midrash:

Sunday–Wednesday.....9:45 PM

Thursday.....10 PM

KEY: 👏👏 Beginners

👏 Intermediate

👏👏 Advanced

👏👏 for men and women

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Not a Taker, Not a Giver CONT'D

else! This callous attitude borders on the wicked, and so we say that his actions are not completely righteous, nor are they completely wicked. He is a middle-of-the-road type of fellow.

On the other hand, someone who maintains this attitude because “what’s mine is mine,” and therefore “what’s yours is yours,”—since I don’t want to be generous to you, it’s only fair that you don’t need to be generous with me—is certainly thinking like a Sodomite. His credo stems from selfishness. He doesn’t want to share, even if he can afford to.

A good litmus test, to determine which category a person falls under, is to see if he is willing to share something when he will personally suffer no loss from others’ gain. If he doesn’t care,

that proves his attitude stems from a reluctance to become indebted to others. “If you wish to be indebted to me at no loss to me, well, be my guest!” But if he doesn’t want to help another fellow out, even though it would cost him nothing, then that demonstrates that he really is a miserable, selfish person—and that he has the dubious distinction of a personal-ity straight out of Sodom!

Ramban (commenting on 19:5) posits that much of what drove Sodom to do horrible things—for example, their “law” on how to get to “know” strangers (see Rashi’s commentary ad loc.)—stemmed from the aforementioned miserable trait, an attribute that led to protectionism and xenophobia so strong that Sodom had laws that instructed its citizens to

be unjust, and to torture, rape, and maim any stranger who was unfortunate enough to wander into the city. Granted, Sodom had plenty of good, rich land—but they absolutely did not want any poor immigrant to just saunter in and make a fortune off of their resources!

Offering residency to Lot, of course, was a different story—he was wealthy and well-connected. Such an immigrant could do wonders to assist their society.

But imagine a flood of people coming off the street, hoping for a better life!

Though they had institutionalized cruelty and perversion, it was ultimately Sodom’s disgust of poor immigrants that sealed its fate. 🙄