

COMPASSION FOR ALL

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Chessed. Caring about others. A lacking in this midah [attribute] is reason to suspect that someone might not be a true descendant of Avraham the person who was the total embodiment of this midah.

Our parsha leads off with Avraham recuperating from his Bris Milah [circumcision], yet, peering out from his tent on a blazing hot day, hoping for guests. When guests do arrive, in the form of three idol-worshipping merchants who seem hesitant about bothering him, he runs out to greet them and begs them to allow him to serve them. Making it seem that it wouldn't be a bother for him by offering to serve them just a few items, Avraham and his wife, Sarah, personally serve up a major, extravagant feast. Three animals were prepared in order to give each traveler the choicest cut of meat.

Meanwhile, in a place that seemed like a different planet although it was not too far away, a very different scene was taking place.

In Sodom and Gomorrah there were laws against hosting any guests. Acts of charity were strictly forbidden as they feared it would lead to a depletion of their accumulated wealth. The repercussions of breaking these laws were most severe.

And then, amazing in her audacity, a young girl was caught smuggling. She had hidden bread in her water pitcher to distribute to the poor when she would ostensibly go out to draw water. We can just imagine the elders of Sodom bemoaning just how hard it was becoming to bring up decent kids: What's with the youth? Why aren't they following our morals? How did they get involved in such contraband? Where did they learn such things from? What will the neighbors say? An example had to be made to discourage others from following in such a path.

This young girl was taken, covered with honey and hoisted atop the city walls. Clouds of hornets attacked and her cries pierced the heavens as her soul left her.

Just a short distance away from Avraham, yet a different world. A clash of world views. A battle of values. A struggle between two opinions of how this world should be run.

Hashem then approached Avraham. He told him that Sodom had to be destroyed. Avraham should have been exuberant! The Cold War has ended he's now the only remaining 'super-power!' His path has been shown to be correct . . .

"Avraham came forward and said: 'Will you even obliterate righteous with wicked? Perhaps there are

fifty righteous people. Would you not spare the place for the sake of the fifty? Perhaps the fifty will lack five. Will You destroy the entire city because of the five? Perhaps forty . . . Perhaps thirty . . . Perhaps twenty . . . Let my Lord not be annoyed, perhaps ten would be found there?' [18:24-32]"

Avraham, the epitome of chessed. Sodom, the complete opposite. Why would he pray for them?

In regard to Hashem we say: And His compassion extends to all of His creations. The entire world only exists through Hashem's chessed. The mission of mankind is to, the best of one's ability, emulate Hashem. Avraham prayed for them. He cared for them, searched for some merit that would protect them and begged Hashem to save them. Similar to Hashem, Avraham's compassion extended to everyone. Although there was a battle of ideologies, he viewed the people of Sodom as Hashem's children and as such, tried to have Hashem's compassion extend to them.

And His compassion extends to all of His creations. Something for us to strive towards.

Good Shabbos,
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