YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Before Sinai: Jewish Values and Jewish Law**

**By Rav Dr. Judah Goldberg**

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This shiur is dedicated in memory of Israel Koschitzky zt"l, whose yahrzeit falls on the 19th of Kislev. May the world-wide dissemination of Torah through the VBM be a fitting tribute to a man whose lifetime achievements exemplified the love of Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael.

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**Shiur #32**

**Pursuit of the Ethical Life (3)**

**Sedom and Yerushalayim**

In the [previous *shiur*](https://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-31-pursuit-ethical-life-2-ways-sedom-and-%E2%80%9Cway-god%E2%80%9D), we concentrated on three pivotal verses at the heart of the Sedom narrative, in which God exclaims that he cannot possibly hide from Avraham what He is doing and explains why Avraham’s involvement is imperative. To recap, various commentaries propose a number of different explanations for why God includes Avraham in His deliberations regarding Sedom. Rashi and the Rashbam explain that Sedom’s location in the Land of Israel is what compels God’s disclosure. The Ramban, on the other hand, stresses Avraham’s virtues of “charity and justice” as the impetus for his participation in this judgment. While the Ramban himself focuses upon how these qualities render Avraham a worthy consultant, the Maharsha recognizes the contrast between Avraham’s strengths and Sedom’s failures, leading us to further suggest that Avraham’s values, through his progeny, are supposed to replace those of Sedom.

**Putting It All Together**

We can perhaps gain further insight into the complex relationship between Avraham and Sedom by combining the approaches of Rashi and the Ramban together. That is, perhaps the mandate of Avraham’s future nation is not just to spread a message of charity and justice in place of Sedom’s miserliness, but to actually found and build a city that embodies this ideology. This city will literally replace Sedom as the cultural capital of the Land of Israel and will anchor the entire land, and all of humanity, in the “way of God.”

Admittedly, there is no trace of such a “counter-city” in the chapters that we have been examining, but my friend Professor David Shyovitz once suggested that the first hints of such a city perhaps appear just a bit later, at the end of *Parashat Vayera*. Following the Binding (*Akeida*) of Yitzchak “upon one of the mountains” in “the land of the Moriya” (*Bereishit* 22:2), Avraham names that site “Hashem Yireh” (God Will See) (22:14). Though we do not hear again about “Hashem Yireh,” “the Moriya” does reappear in *Divrei Ha-yamim* as the name of the mountain upon which King Shlomo builds the Temple (II 3:1).

Accordingly, rabbinic tradition maintains that the Temple was constructed upon the place called Hashem Yireh,[[1]](#footnote-1) an association that is also supported by the frequent use of the term “*re’iya*” in connection to the Temple, as in the commandment for all males “to be seen (*yeira’eh*)” there on the Festivals (*Shemot* 23:15, 17 and 34:20, 23-24; *Devarim* 16:16 and 31:11).[[2]](#footnote-2) Furthermore, according to Onkelos and Rashi, Avraham himself anticipates this outcome: His naming constitutes a prayer that the site of the *Akeida* should forever be a place of intense Divine presence and thus worship before God. In other words, through the *Akeida* and its aftermath, Avraham lays the spiritual foundations for the Temple and the surrounding city of Yerushalayim.

**Sedom and “Shalem”**

Connecting the place of “Hashem Yireh” to Sedom requires a bit of imagination, on several counts. First, we have left the single paragraph that comprises Chapters 18-19 of *Sefer Bereishit* and that clearly constitutes a unified story to assert that all of *Parashat Vayera* (Chapters 18-22) is interconnected. Second, while we went looking for a city that would represent Avraham’s ethic (value #3), we instead found one that symbolizes Avraham’s spiritual devotion and ritual worship of God (value #4). Third, it is not obvious that Avraham is founding a substitute city at all. Perhaps Avraham is only consecrating a site of worship, which incidentally was incorporated into a city at some later point.

Nevertheless, I believe that Professor Shyovitz’s thesis proves cogent by looking both before and after. First, the contrast between Sedom and a proto-Yerushalayim has a precedent earlier in *Sefer Bereishit*, in the epilogue to the war between four invading kings and the five kings of Sedom and her sister cities (14:17-24). Upon Avraham’s return from his conquest of the foreign forces and his liberation of the Sodomites and their possessions, the king of Sedom comes out to greet him (14:17). The Chizkuni comments that the next verse ought to continue with the king’s negotiations with Avraham over the spoils, but instead, another character bursts onto the scene:

And Malki-Tzedek, king of Shalem, brought out bread and wine, and he was a priest for the Supreme God. He blessed him, saying, “Blessed is Avram to the Supreme God, Master of heaven and earth.” (14:19).

Only after they finish their exchange does the king of Sedom make his offer (14:21).

As R. Mordechai Breuer observes, Avraham is encountering two different kings, representative of two different cities. By inserting Malki-Tzedek into Avraham’s interaction with the king of Sedom, the Torah asks us to read the king’s offer in contrast to Malki-Tzedek’s conduct (“Yerushalayim,” 327-328).[[3]](#footnote-3) Malki-Tzedek hails from Shalem, which commentators generally identify (following *Tehillim* 76:3) as the precursor to Yerushalayim.[[4]](#footnote-4) He is named for righteousness (*Tzedek*), as are all of its ancient rulers.[[5]](#footnote-5) He altruistically extends food and blessing — the same gestures that Avraham offers in *Parashat Vayera* — to Avraham, who graciously accepts.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The other king is from Sedom and bears a name (Bera) that suggests evil (see *Bereishit* *Rabba* 42:5 and *Tanchuma*, *Lekh Lekha* 8 [Warsaw ed.]). What should we make of his offer (14:21), “Give me the captives, and you take the property?”

*Midrash Tanchuma* remarks that the king of Sedom “is willing and not willing.” In other words, he is begrudging. The *midrash* continues: “He said to him, ‘Had [the four kings] killed me, they would have taken all of my possessions. Now that you saved me, take the possessions, and give me the captives” (*Lekh Lekha*, 17 [Buber ed.]). Whether or not this offer is fair, it is most definitely calculated. Even in the wake of miraculous salvation, the king of Sedom is not feeling magnanimous. He will concede what he must, but he will bargain first for whatever he can recover. And of this, of course, Avraham wants no part (14:23).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Thus, Sedom and Shalem, R. Breuer emphasizes, already represent two opposing moral traditions long before we get to *Parashat Vayera*.[[8]](#footnote-8) Upon this backdrop, when the Torah describes the destruction of the former and the rededication of the latter within the span of just a few chapters, we may legitimately conclude, Professor Shyovitz suggests, that we are witnessing a process of ideological succession.

**“We Were Like Sedom”**

Second, the contrast between the ways of Sedom, long-gone but still a moral icon, and the expectations of Yerushalayim is even more explicit in *Sefer Yeshayahu*. By then, Yerushalayim has strayed from its roots, leading Yeshayahu to cry, “How did it become a harlot, the capital that was so faithful!” Invoking familiar terms, Yeshayahu laments that “She was full of justice (*mishpat*), righteousness (*tzedek*) lodged in her, but now murderers” (1:21). He beseeches the nation, “Learn to do good; seek justice (*mishpat*); back the aggrieved; mediate (*shiftu*) for the orphan; fight for the widow!” (1:17).

Furthermore, envisioning the future rehabilitation of Yerushalayim, Yeshayahu continues with the same themes:

And I will restore your judges (*shofetayikh*) as they once were, and your advisers as in the beginning; after that, you will be called the City of Righteousness (*tzedek*) and the Faithful Capital. Zion will be redeemed through justice (*mishpat*), and her captives through charity (*tzedaka*).[[9]](#footnote-9)

Yeshayahu foresees this as Yerushalayim’s future. One day she will return to her original mission of “righteousness/ charity” (*tzedek*/ *tzedaka*) and “justice” (*mishpat*), exactly the qualities for which Avraham is chosen in *Parashat Vayera*. But what has she sunk to in the meantime? Yeshayahu’s comparison, “We were like Sedom; we resembled Amora,” (1:9) is chilling, and God simply echoes him (1:10): “Listen to the word of Hashem, officers of Sedom! Heed the teaching of our God, nation of Amora!” Yerushalayim has devolved into that which it came to supplant. The worst nightmare of *Parashat Vayera* has come true, and the city of Yerushalayim, if it does not change its ways, is doomed.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Not only does *Chazon Yeshayahu*, as the opening chapter of the book is commonly called, firmly establish the dichotomy between Yerushalayim and Sedom, but it also addresses another concern about reading *Parashat Vayera* as a single unit: How does the spiritual vision for Yerushalayim that appears at the end of the *parasha* relate to the ethical vacuum left by Sedom’s destruction at the beginning? Yeshayahu answers that these two dimensions must be inextricably linked, as they were for Malki-Tzedek and Avraham themselves!

Malki-Tzedek is, at the same time, the original archetype of benevolence, as well as a “priest for the Supreme God” (*Bereishit* 14:18). Consequently, his offerings to Avraham are a blend of the material — “bread and wine” (14:18) — and the spiritual — “He blessed him, saying ‘Blessed is Avram to the Supreme God’” (14:19). Avraham imitates both behaviors in *Parashat Vayera*, both welcoming guests and praying on behalf of Sedom and Avimelekh (20:17). The city that emerges from their joint legacy must similarly reflect the totality of their personalities.

However, by the time of Yeshayahu, it no longer does. If the abuse of the downtrodden and the perversion of justice that now characterize Yerushalayim are not bad enough, God says through Yeshayahu, the fact that the Temple worship continues unabated is downright abominable:

“For what do I need of all your sacrifices?” says God. “I have had my full of burnt offerings of rams and the fats of plump livestock, and I do not want the blood of bulls and lambs and he-goats.” (11)

“And when you spread your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even when you pray at length, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.” (15)

Ethical uprightness is an absolute prerequisite for ritual worship. “Charity and justice” are the lynchpins that transform the mere slaughtering of animals into desired sacrifice and prattle into soothing words of prayer. Holding on to just the end of *Parashat Vayera* without the beginning, on the other hand, is a corruption of the legacy of Avraham that turns his chosen progeny into just another cultic sect.

**The Makeup of Yerushalayim**

If the people of Sedom were “bad” to each other and “sinners" to God (*Bereishit* 13:13; *Bereishit Rabba* 41:7), then Yerushalayim must be the diametric opposite, on both counts. More, “Hashem Yireh” of Avraham is built upon the “Shalem” of Malki-Tzedek; the ritual is contingent upon the ethical. This duality, in fact, is what the very name Yerushalayim captures:

Avraham called it “Yireh,” as it says, “Avraham named that place Hashem Yireh.” Shem called it “Shalem,” as it says, “And Malki-Tzedek, king of Shalem.”[[11]](#footnote-11) The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, “If I call it ‘Yireh,’ as Avraham called it, Shem, a righteous man, will be resentful, and if I call it ‘Shalem,’ Avraham, a righteous man, will be resentful. Rather, I will call it ‘Yerushalayim,’ as they both called it: Yireh-Shalem — Yerushalayim. (*Bereishit Rabba* 56:10)[[12]](#footnote-12)

From this *midrash* we learn, for our purposes, two points. First, inasmuch as the *midrash* sees the name “Yireh” as an alternative to “Shalem,” it confirms that Avraham at the *Akeida* was not merely consecrating a place of worship but was, by extension, rededicating a city. This point, in fact, may be implicit in the text of the *Akeida* itself. God does not send Avraham to the “Mountain of the Moriya,” but to a mountain in the “land of the Moriya,” which multiple commentators explain as the territory of Yerushalayim.[[13]](#footnote-13) In that case, *Bereishit*’s “land of the Moriya… upon one of the mountains” becomes identical to *Divrei Ha-yamim*’s “Yerushalayim, on the mountain of the Moriya.” In other words, both God’s command and Avraham’s subsequent naming relate to the Temple site as the spiritual epicenter of a city. And indeed, the understanding of Yerushalayim as an organic extension of the Temple is explicit in our liturgical references to “Yerushalayim, your Temple” and finds expression in multiple areas of law.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Second, the *midrash* underscores Yeshayahu’s message that the essence of Yerushalayim, down to its very name, is the coupling of Avraham’s spiritual worship with the ethical vision that defies Sedom. When the two become unhinged, as so tragically happened in the days of Yeshayahu, “Yerushalayim” quite literally falls apart.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**Summary**

Through the whole of *Parashat Vayera*, then, we witness a blending of all four elements of *berit Avot*. The story of the birth, election (see *Bereishit* 21:12), and “sparing” of Yitzchak, progenitor of a Jewish nation (value #1), is interwoven with the fusion of the spiritual (value #4) and the ethical (value #3) in establishing a new center of power for the Land of Israel (value #2). The foil for all this is Sedom — a dark, ruthless place that is a blight upon the Land of Israel. The “way of God,” through Avraham and his progeny, will overcome the bleak outlook of Sedom; the “City of Righteousness” will replace the city where “the footsteps of travelers have been forgotten” (*Iyov* 28:4); and an economic capital of the Land of Canaan will give way to a new beacon of goodness that will shine forth from the Land of Israel.[[16]](#footnote-16)

However, though Sedom has been wiped off the face of civilization, it lives on within the Jewish imagination. As a cultural and moral icon, Sedom remains the foil to “the way of God” in general and to Yerushalayim in particular, and it is invoked as such by both *Tanakh* and *Chazal*. Avraham’s children have not forgotten Sedom, and their task is to repudiate its values at every turn. The next *shiur* will continue this theme and evaluate the meaning of Sedom for everyday Jewish life thousands of years after its disappearance.

**For Further Thought:**

1. As mentioned above, linking the dedication of “Hashem Yireh” to the destruction of Sedom requires reading the entirety of *Parashat Vayera* as one elaborate unit. Are there literary features of the text that support this reading?

Robert Alter already observed that in comparison to other “annunciation type-scenes” (see, for example, *Shoftim* 13:3-24, *I Shmuel* 1:17-20 and *II Melakhim* 4:16-17), that of Yitzchak is unusual in the delay between the announcement of Yitzchak’s birth (*Bereishit* 18:10) and its actual occurrence (21:1). As such, the Torah pulls not only the story of Sedom into this narrative, but also the story of Avraham and Sara’s travel to Gerar and their encounter with Avimelekh.

Alter documents a number of recurring themes that tie all of these episodes together, including sexuality/ procreation (18:10-12; 19:5-8, 31-38; 20:2-4, 17-18; and 21:1-7), prayer (18:23-33 and 20:7, 17), sight and blindness (18:1-2, 16, 21; 19:1, 11, 17, 26, 28; and 20:10, 16; also see 18:17), and justice: Avimelekh’s appeal to God, “Will you kill the nation, including the innocent (*tzaddik*)?” (20:4) is reminiscent of Avraham’s question, “Will you consume the righteous (*tzaddik*) with the wicked?” (18:23; also see 18:25, as well as 19:9)[[17]](#footnote-17)

Extending this unit through the *Akeida* necessarily encompasses the banishment of Yishmael (21:9-21), arguably an integral part of Yitzchak’s birth and election, and an epilogue to the Avimelekh story (21:22-34). We can point to at least three common literary elements that run through these narratives as well. First, the verb *y-d-a,* regarding both God and humans, appears repeatedly throughout these chapters. Broadly, it seems that God and Avraham “know” in positive senses (18:19, 21; 20:6; and 22:12), whereas Sedom wants to “know” in a negative sense (19:5). Lot and Avimelekh, however, both “do not know” (19:33, 35, and 21:26; also see 19:8 and 20:5), suggesting a moral mediocrity born of apathy.[[18]](#footnote-18) Second, the fear of God appears twice; Avraham possesses it (22:12), whereas Avimelekh does not (20:11). Third, the theme of sight also continues (21:9, 16, 19 and 22:4, 8, 13-14) and, according to R. Breuer, constitutes a central motif of the *Akeida*. “Moriya” may reflect one or both of these last two themes of fear of God (*yira*) and sight (*re’iya*; “Yerushalayim,” 336-337).[[19]](#footnote-19) Also, according to the Sages’ interpretation of the “*eshel*” in 21:33 as a provision for wayfarers (*Sota* 10a), the Torah is echoing the theme of welcoming guests that is so central to Chapters 18-19. Finally, in evaluating the structural unity of *Parashat Vayera*, we should also consider the assigned Torah readings for Rosh Hashana (21:1-22:24); see *Megilla* 31a.[[20]](#footnote-20)

1. Could the dichotomy between the ways of Avraham and those of Sedom predate even *Parashiyot Lekh Lekha* and *Vayera*? Looking further back in *Sefer Bereishit*, we find that Sedom and her sister cities first appear in 10:19, in the context of the Torah’s division of the Earth among Noach’s descendants (10:1-32). Sedom and the adjacent cities mark the southeast border of Canaanite territory, while Gerar lies in the southwest.

Immediately prior to this division, in what clearly serves as a prologue to it (see 9:18-19), Noach offers blessings and curses to his children in response to their respective treatment of him when he falls asleep naked. From the outset, Cham is identified as “the father of Canaan” (9:18, 22), suggesting that Canaan’s destiny is about to be determined. Canaan is subsequently cursed by Noach to be a slave to Shem (9:25-27). Understanding that the Torah is establishing a new political order that will govern the post-flood world, multiple commentators explain that Noach is decreeing the eventual takeover of the Land of Canaan by descendants of Shem.[[21]](#footnote-21)

What characterizes the different responses of Cham and Shem to their father’s exposure? Broadly speaking, while Cham makes no effort to “clothe the naked,” Shem takes the lead in protecting Noach’s dignity. Could Shem and Cham’s different mentalities already predict the opposing moral traditions of their respective descendants, Avraham and Sedom?[[22]](#footnote-22) Could Noach’s blessing that God should “dwell in the tents of Shem” (9:27) anticipate the merging of the spiritual and ethical domains in a sanctuary in Yerushalayim? Also remember that according to the Sages, Shem appears later on in *Sefer* *Bereishit* as Malki-Tzedek! In other words, even before Avraham, Shem establishes an oasis of “*tzedek*” and worship in the middle of Canaan’s sphere of influence.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Also, based upon 10:19, R. Yoel Bin-Nun argues that although the entire land west of the Jordan belonged to Canaan’s descendants, only the tribes in the Jordan Valley and in the coastal plain carry the name “Canaanites,” whereas the inhabitants of the central mountain range are called “Amorites.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Is it merely coincidental that the Sodomites, among others, are specifically associated with their ancestor Canaan? Additionally, if the cursing of Canaan integrates the future transfer of power in the Land of Canaan into the Torah’s post-*Mabul* world order, could the mention of Sedom in this context foreshadow its destruction?[[25]](#footnote-25)

Gerar, too, appears in 10:19. Significantly, it is the other Canaanite population (see Ramban on *Bereishit* 10:14-15 and *Devarim* 2:23) to which Avraham relates in *Parashat Vayera*. Though very different from each other, could Sedom and Gerar be two different manifestations of Canaan’s moral tradition that Avraham must confront?[[26]](#footnote-26)

Finally, the story of Noach’s exposure immediately follows his family’s departure from the Ark. Could Cham and Shem’s divergent responses represent different reactions to the generation of the Flood and its moral downfall? [[27]](#footnote-27)

1. How do the judgments of Noach’s generation and that of Sedom compare to each other? See, for example, *Bereishit Rabba* 49:5, 9.
2. If Noach’s blessings and curses to his respective children indeed predict future events in *Sefer Bereishit*, might that influence our understanding of Sedom’s war with the invading powers in Chapter 14? That is, Kedarlaomer, king of Eilam, heads an alliance of kings that subjugates Sedom and its sister cities, as well as other parts of the Land of Canaan (see 14:4-7). Eilam is counted among Shem’s children (*Bereishit* 10:22), and thus the Sages explicitly identify Kedarlaomer as a descendant of Shem (*Tanchuma*, *Lekh Lekha*, 19 [Buber ed.]). Descriptively, the progeny of Canaan are serving (“*avedu*” [14:4]) the offspring of Shem, thus fulfilling Noach’s prophecy that Canaan will be an “*eved*” to Shem (9:26-27)!

Is this mere coincidence, or can we speculate that Noach’s prophecy inspires Kedarlaomer’s attempted takeover? Why does Avraham — specifically identified here as a descendant of Ever, great-grandson of Shem (14:13; see *Bereishit Rabba* 42:8) — take the Canaanites’ side? Perhaps we can suggest that Kedarlaomer is capitalizing on a political prediction but is unaware of its ethical backbone. Avraham, on the other hand, understands that hostile takeover of Sedom without a cultural revolution does nothing to advance the world order that Noach predicted. According to the Sages, Avraham is nervous about how Shem will react, but, if Malki-Tzedek is indeed Shem, then Avraham receives a ringing endorsement of his perspective from the original bearer of the blessing himself![[28]](#footnote-28)

1. As multiple scholars note, Avraham is twice informed of Yitzchak’s birth — first in *Bereishit* 17:16-19, and then again in 18:10.[[29]](#footnote-29) Can our analysis in the last two *shiurim* explain why the anticipation of Yitzchak’s birth must be embedded within the storyline of Avraham’s hospitality and Sedom’s destruction, even if it has already appeared in another context?
2. The Talmud records that various workers who supported the functioning of the Temple worship were compensated out of the *terumat ha-lishka*, the public fund that exclusively served “the needs of the sacrifices” (see *Ketubot* 106a-b). Surprisingly, judges of Yerushalayim who handled cases of theft were also paid out of the *terumat ha-lishka* (105a). In what way are these judges supporting the sacrifices and therefore eligible for payment from this dedicated fund?
	1. The Ra’avad (quoted by the *Shita Mekubetzet*) suggests that their rulings served the needs of the Temple worship, for they were responsible for punishing transgressors both inside and outside of the Temple.
	2. The Chazon Ish (*Menachot* 28:5) suggests that keeping theft in check is necessary for the Temple worship, because otherwise stolen goods would end up being offered as sacrifices.
	3. In another context, Tosafot (*Mo’ed Katan* 6a, *Me’ila* 14a) suggest that the sanctity of the *terumat ha-lishka* is conditional and that the *beit din* can in fact divert it to other communal needs.[[30]](#footnote-30)
	4. Can we suggest a different answer, based on the first chapter of *Yeshayahu*? If the Temple’s ritual worship is indeed contingent on Yerushalayim’s being a “City of Righteousness,”[[31]](#footnote-31) could an active judicial system be considered, literally, a “need of the sacrifices”?

**Questions or Comments?**

Please email me directly with your feedback at judahlgoldberg@gmail.com!

1. See, for example, Rambam, *Hilkhot Beit Ha-bechira* 2:1-2. However, see Rashi and Tosafot on *Ta’anit* 16a and the discussion by R. Yonatan Grossman, *Abraham: A Story of a Journey* (Tel Aviv: 2014), 331-333. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See *Bereishit Rabba* 56:10. Rabbeinu Bechaye (*Shemot* 34:23) further notes that the Sages (*Chagiga* 4b) also read the non-vowelized “*yeira’eh*” as “*Yireh*,” the same play on words that appears explicitly in *Bereishit* 22:14; similarly, see *Keli Yakar* and *Ha’amek Davar* there. Also, the aforementioned verse from *Divrei Ha-yamim* adds that the Mountain of the Moriya is the place where God “appeared (*nira*) to David,” which, according to the Malbim, purposely echoes *Bereishit* 22:14. Also see *Zekharya* 9:14 and *Tehillim* 84:8, as well as R. Mordechai Breuer, “Yerushalayim,” *Pirkei Moadot* (Jerusalem: 1993), 342-346. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. According to R. Grossman, the two encounters demonstrate close linguistic parallelism. Furthermore, the particular syntax of verses 17-18 suggests a purposeful contrast: “The king of Sedom went out (*vayetze*) to greet” Avraham, **but** Malki-Tzedek “brought out (*hotzi*) bread and wine” (*Abraham*, 84-85). Also see R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Abraham’s Journey*, 131-132; and Nechama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit* (trans. Aryeh Newman; Yerushalayim: 1973), 131-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Onkelos, ibn Ezra, Radak and Ramban. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *Bereishit Rabba* 43:6, as well as ibn Ezra and Ramban. Also see Ralbag on *Yehoshua* 10:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. R. Breuer argues that the Torah deliberately skips Malki-Tzedek’s own “going out,” in contrast to that of the king of Sedom (“Yerushalayim,” 327). In contrast, I would suggest that for Malki-Tzedek, greeting and offering are the same. Paradigmatic of true “*hakhnasat orechim*,” Malki-Tzedek greets Avraham through food, just as Avraham will do to his visitors in Chapter 18. Also see *Midrash Tehillim* 37, which asserts that Avraham’s commitment to charity draws inspiration from Malki-Tzedek. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Midrash Lekach Tov* adds that the king of Sedom “thought that Avraham was just pursuing money.” Projecting his own preoccupations onto Avraham, including the paranoia that the world is after his wealth, the king presumed that Avraham entered the fray simply to snatch up the spoils. However, compare to Ramban.

R. Grossman further notes the emphasis on property and its confiscation in the narrative itself (14:11-16), which apparently reflects the priorities of Sedom. Avraham, on the other hand, is motivated by the news that “his relative had been kidnapped” (14:14), and only in his rescue of the spoils of war does the Torah even mention that there were other human captives (*Abraham*, 81-83). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “Yerushalayim,” 329-330; also see R. Grossman, *Abraham*, 89. Additionally, the *Meshekh Chokhma* suggests that the term “your adversaries” in Malki-Tzedek’s comments to Avraham (14:20) actually refers to Sedom, rather than to the invading kings. In other words, the tension between Avraham and Sedom is already made explicit in Chapter 14 by none other than Malki-Tzedek. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Also see 56:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Also see *Yirmeyahu* 23:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rabbinic tradition identifies Malki-Tzedek as Shem, son of Noach (also see *Nedarim* 32b). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Also see the commentaries of the Rosh and *Meshekh Chokhma* on *Bereishit* 22:14. Regarding the original names, also see *Tosefta, Berakhot* 1:16, and the parallel texts in *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Yirmeyahu*, 321 and *Tehillim*, 815). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Rashi, Radak and Ramban; also see Tosafot Rid, *Ta’anit* 16a. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See, for instance, *Tosefta, Keilim* 1:10 (Vilna ed.), and Rambam’s commentary to *Sukka* 3:10 and *Rosh Hashana* 4:1. Also see *mori ve-rabbi* R. Hershel Schachter’s *Nefesh Ha-Rav*, 78-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See R. Breuer, “*Yerushalayim*,” 345-346. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Robert Alter also notes the contrast between the Sodomites’ homosexual behavior, necessarily sterile and thus symbolic of their dead-endedness in history, and the prediction of progeny, and thus continuity, for Avraham (“Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative," *Tikkun* 1:1 [Spring 1986], 33). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “Sodom as Nexus,” 31-38. Also see R. Grossman, *Abraham*, 240-242, 258-262. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Regarding Avimelekh, see *Makkot* 9a; regarding Lot, see *Nazir* 23a and *Horayot* 10b. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Also see *Bereishit Rabba* 55:7 and Ramban on *Bereishit* 22:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. My neighbor Tomer Moskowitz once suggested that Avraham’s admonition of Avimelekh (*Bereishit* 21:25) serves as an important counterweight to the beginning of *Parashat Vayera*. Lest one conclude that Avraham takes the attitude of “what’s mine is yours and what’s yours is yours” (*Avot* 5:10) to an extreme, here he asserts his property rights, thus demonstrating his balance of “charity and justice.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Rashi on 9:26, Radak on 10:19, and Ramban on 9:26 and 10:15. Also see Rashbam, edition by David Razin (New York, 1949), 12, n. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Moreover, *Sanhedrin* 70a quotes an opinion that Cham sexually assaulted Noach. This would further strengthen the connection to Sedom, as noted by *Meshekh Chokhma* (10:19). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See *Midrash Tehillim* 76 and Ramban on *Bereishit* 14:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. “The Land and the Land of Canaan,” *Torah MiEtzion: New Readings in Tanach — Bereshit* (Jerusalem: 2011), 81-86 (available in the original Hebrew at: http://files8.design-editor.com/92/9266067/UploadedFiles/BFEB9485-8777-3183-5359-B2D6488B38B7.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Notably, the *Midrash Tanchuma* in *Vayera* (5) specifically references this verse. Also see *Meshekh Chokhma* ad loc*.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. R. Bin-Nun further distinguishes between the sins of the Amorites, which do not deserve immediate punishment (*Bereishit* 15:16), and the sins of Sedom, which God cannot tolerate any longer (84n; also see R. Yaakov Medan, *The Word is Very Near – Bereishit* [Heb.] [Tel Aviv: 2014], 99-100). Interestingly, the coastal population, too, appears not to have survived as long as the Amorites, though *Chulin* 60b offers a different rationale for this. See *Devarim* 2:23 and the Ramban’s extensive discussion there. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Also see *Midrash Tehillim* 37, which suggests that Shem’s kindness in the Ark inspires Avraham’s own deep engagement in giving. Cham, by contrast, defies a prohibition against marital relations in the Ark (*Yerushalmi, Ta’anit* 1:6), which might represent callousness to the surrounding destruction (see *BT Ta’anit* 11a; compare to *Tanchuma*, *Noach*, 11). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See *Tanchuma*, *Lekh Lekha*, 19 (Buber ed.). Regarding the war and its aftermath and Avraham’s conduct, also see *Nedarim* 32a; R. Bin-Nun, “‘*Ha-aretz’ Ve-‘Eretz Kena’an’ Ba-Torah*,” *Pirkei Ha-avot,* 55-56 (available at <http://files8.design-editor.com/92/9266067/UploadedFiles/BFEB9485-8777-3183-5359-B2D6488B38B7.pdf>); and R. Medan, *The Word is Very Near*, 96-99 (available in English as “From Babel to Berit bein HaBetarim — The Early Life of Abraham,” *Torah MiEtzion: New Readings in Tanach — Bereshit* [Jerusalem: 2011], 121-125). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See R. Grossman, “*Abraham,*” 155-170; R. Ezra Bick, “The Changed Abraham,” *Torah MiEtzion: New Readings in Tanach — Bereshit*, 153-156, available at: <http://etzion.org.il/en/avraham-and-angels>; and Alter, “Sodom as Nexus,” 31. Also see Ramban on 18:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Also see Rashi *Ketubot* 106a, as well as the earlier version of his commentary on 105a (quoted by the *Shita Mekubetzet*). Also see R. Chayim Kanievsky’s *Shekel Ha-kodesh* on Rambam, *Hilkhot Shekalim*, 4:58. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Notably, R. Chayim Kanievsky (*Shekel Ha-kodesh* 4:61) limits this allowance to the judges of Yerushalayim only, and not those of the rest of the Land of Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)