

Temple Beth-El Shabbat AM Torah Study...Genesis 18:16-22

	FOX	JPS	HEBREW
16	The men arose from there, and looked down upon the face of Sodom, and Avraham went with them to escort them.	The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off.	וַיִּקְמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁקֹפוּ עַל-פְּנֵי סֹדֶם וְאַבְרָהָם הִלֵּךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְחָם
17	Now YHWH had said (to himself): Shall I cover up from Avraham what I am about to do?	Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,	וַיְהִי וְאָמַר הַמַּכְסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה
18	For Avraham is to become, yes, become a great nation and mighty (in number), and all the nations of the earth will find blessing through him.	since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him?	וְאַבְרָהָם הָיוּ יְהִיָּה לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְעֲצוּם וְנִבְרָכוּ בוֹ כָּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ
19	Indeed, I have known him, in order that he may charge his sons and his household after him: they shall keep the way of YHWH, to do what is right and just, in order that YHWH may bring upon Avraham what he spoke concerning him.	For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.”	כִּי יָדַעְתִּיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת-בְּנָיו וְאֶת-בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשָׁמְרוּ דֶרֶךְ יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הֵבִיא יְהוָה עַל- אַבְרָהָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר עָלָיו
20	So YHWH said: The outcry in Sodom and Amora—how great it is! And their sin—how exceedingly heavily it weighs!	Then the Lord said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave!	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה וְעַקַּת סֹדֶם וְעַמּוֹרָה כִּי-רַבָּה וַחֲטָאתָם כִּי כְבֹדָה מְאֹד
21	So let me go down and see: if they have done according to its cry that has come to me—destruction! And if not—I wish to know.	I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me; if not, I will take note.”	אֲרִדָּה-נָא וְאַרְאֶה הַכְּצַעְעָקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עָשׂוּ כָלָה וְאִם-לֹא אֲדַעָה
22	The men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Avraham still stood in the presence of YHWH.	The men went on from there to Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord.	וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סֹדְמָה וְאַבְרָהָם עוֹדְנֵו עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה

V. 16

RADAK¹...*men set out from there*... from the house of Avraham.

¹ Rabbi David Kimhi (1160-1235) was a French medieval rabbi, biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.

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they looked down at the city of Sodom facing them...

- **RASHI**²... Wherever the Hiphil form of **הִשְׁקִיף** occurs in the Scriptures it denotes taking notice for the purpose of bringing evil (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa 14), except (Deuteronomy 26:15) (a passage dealing with the tithe, including that given to the poor), “Look forth (**הִשְׁקִיפָה**) from thy holy habitation . . . [and bless thy people] for so great is the power (virtue) of giving to the poor that it changes God’s anger into mercy.
- **RADAK**... the direction in which they faced was Sodom. The expression **הִשְׁקִיפָה** occurs both in a benevolent sense and in a malevolent sense, depending on the context. The expression also appears sometimes in the passive mode and other times in the causative, transitive mode, hiphil. The reason for the latter mode is that when one looks at someone or something, one is, normally, at the same time visible to the ones one looks at. Hence the passive mode is justified also. When the viewer remains invisible to the one at whom he looks, such as God or angels, there is no call for the passive mode, hence we have the causative mode here, seeing that the people of Sodom could not see the angels.

kept walking with them to see them off...

- **CHIZKUNI**³...According to Rashi, the reason that the Torah uses this formulation is that Avraham still thought that these creatures were his guests. He thought so in spite of the fact that they made a [for mortals presumptuous] statement that they guaranteed that they would return at that time in the following years, a statement that no mortal can make and be taken seriously. He assumed that though the person making this promise was mortal, he was a prophet and spoke as a messenger of God.
- **RADAK**... to keep them company for a while, to accompany them. [not to make sure they departed. Ed.] The Torah teaches good manners, i.e. that one does not dismiss a guest abruptly, but by walking with him indicates that one regrets the time had come to part from one another. Our sages in Sotah 46 suggest that the distance one should accompany a guest from one’s house is approximately 1.2 kilometers.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA**⁴... Immediately afterwards the Torah writes: “and God had said shall I hide from Avraham, etc.” It appears that Avraham merited this visit from God because he had performed the **מְצוּהָ** of accompanying his visitors some distance on the next part of their journey. Our sages in Sotah 46 have derived from here that a student has to accompany the teacher when the teacher departs from him as far as the outer perimeter of the town. The Talmud adopts guidelines as to the respective distances which people of different degrees of prominence need to be accompanied. It is all based on a specific verse in Psalms 91:11, “for He will command His angels to (guard, accompany) you.”

² Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105) was a medieval French rabbi and author.

³ Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (1250-1310) was a French rabbi and student.

⁴ Rabbi Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340) was a commentator on Tanach.

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JPS... THE ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT SODOM (vv. 17-22)

God now makes Abraham privy to one of His historic decisions. Ten generations earlier He had disclosed His secret purposes to Noah (6:12f.), but only in order to save the man's life. Here foreknowledge permits Abraham to plead disinterestedly for other people's lives. One is reminded of the words of Amos in 3:7, "Indeed, My Lord God does nothing / Without having revealed His purpose / To His servants the prophets." Jeremiah, in 23:18, expresses the same notion when he refers to the one "who has stood in the council of the Lord, / And seen and heard His word." In the case of the prophets, the divine foretelling is an expression of God's love for humanity, meant to warn of impending calamity in the hope of bringing about repentance and the enhancement of the human condition. Such was the case, for instance, in the Book of Jonah. In this prior revelation to Abraham of God's intentions toward Sodom, both the patriarch's humanity and God's morality are put to the test.

Abraham is granted this singular privilege because he symbolizes the future Jewish nation, which is destined to become a source of blessing to other nations. As such, he cannot avoid direct involvement in the fortunes of humanity at large. At the same time, he is the repository of those eternal values of righteousness and justice that constitute "the way of the Lord." God relies upon him to transmit this heritage to his posterity, which is the indispensable precondition for the fulfillment of the divine promises. The lessons of Sodom and Gomorrah, the judgment of God, and the actions of Abraham exemplify the principles of justice and righteousness, divine and human.

V. 17

ALTER...And the LORD had thought... The verb '*amar*, "say," is sometimes used elliptically for '*amar belibo*, "said to himself," and that seems clearly the case here. With the two divine messengers about to be sent off on their mission of destruction, God will be left alone with Abraham, and before addressing him, He reflects for a moment on the nature of His covenantal relationship with the patriarch and what that dictates as to revealing divine intention to a human partner. Abraham is in this fashion thrust into the role of prophet, and God will so designate him in chapter 20.

Should I hide from Abraham what I am doing?...

- **PLAUT...**Perhaps God *wants* Abraham to argue the justice of the divine plan. Rashi writes: God has appointed Abraham as the "father of a multitude of nations" (Gen. 17:5), and hence the people of Sodom are his children, too. Should God not tell a father the fate of his children? Rashi's argument reflects the Mishnaic discussion about Hebrew prayers to be recited by converts. The proof text in the argument is Gen. 17:5, because there Abraham is called the "father of a multitude of nations," and hence all converts to Judaism are called children of Abraham.
- **SFORNO⁵...** it is appropriate that I do not conceal from Avraham my attribute of goodness; I will inform him that if among all these wicked people in Sodom I find even a

⁵ Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (1475-1550) was a biblical commentator, philosopher, and physician from Italy.

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quorum of 10 righteous people, this will represent hope that eventually all or most of these people will become penitents. In that event I would bend the scales of justice in favor of the town, giving them an extension of time before destroying them. God teaches that He is more interested in the return of sinners to the fold than in administering retribution to them.

- **RASHBAM**⁶... the fact that I am about to overturn Sodom and its satellite towns. God reasoned seeing that Avraham was sure to tell his descendants of God's promise to him to give the whole land of Canaan to his descendants, He would diminish these descendants' inheritance by utterly destroying these towns and the valley which were part of area promised to the Jewish people as an inheritance. He therefore felt duty-bound to obtain Avraham's consent of what He was about to do. We had learned in Genesis 10:19 that the boundaries of the Canaanite extended to regions that included the Jordan valley. God considered it inappropriate to deny Avraham fulfillment of part of His promise by making these parts of the land of Canaan totally useless to its inhabitants.
- **DAAT ZKENIM**⁷... God would not have revealed the future to Avraham except for the fact that he had a future way beyond his physical death. What difference would it then have made if he knew about the fate of Sodom and what had caused it? Seeing that Avraham would become a witness to My exacting retribution from sinners, (even when I do not bring on another deluge) he will be not only be telling his offspring about it, but use his first hand knowledge as a reason to impress them with the fact that God not only knows what goes on here on earth, but reacts to it appropriately at a time of His own choosing. Only by paying heed to that knowledge will they live to inherit the land of the Canaanites who will then share the fate of Sodom more or less, [their land not being destroyed. Ed.] Unless his descendants were to practice justice and righteousness, they would not inherit that land.
- **OR HACHAIM**⁸... God chose the word המכסה deliberately. Abraham noted that the third angel had a mission which had so far not been revealed to him, in contrast with the missions of the other two angels which had become manifest to him already. One had come to heal him and the other to tell Sarah about her impending motherhood. Moreover, when the angels departed from him, Abraham noticed that two of them walked in the direction of Sodom. Abraham accompanied those two angels to see them off. He realized that these angels still had a mission to perform on earth, something which had been concealed from him. Abraham would become aware of those angels' mission after the event. God was concerned lest he would feel badly in retrospect if He would not now take him into His confidence. Our sages (*Tanchuma* item 5 on our portion) state that the reason God decided to take Abraham into His confidence was because Abraham entertained doubts about the justice of God having brought on the deluge. He found it impossible to believe that there had not been at least ten or twenty righteous people at

⁶ Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, or Rashbam, (c. 1085-c. 1158) was Rashi's grandson and a leading French Tosafist out of Troyes.

⁷ Daat Zekenim is a Torah commentary compiled by later generations of scholars from the Franco-German (Ba'alei HaTosafot) school in the 13th century.

⁸ Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (1696-1743), a Talmudist and kabbalist, wrote *Or HaChaim*, his commentary on the Torah.

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that time. In his opinion God should have suspended judgment on their account. The words אשר אני עושה then mean: "as I am used to do," i.e. I do not destroy a nation unless there are no righteous people left.

God had another reason to reveal to Abraham what He had in mind for Sodom, seeing it had been Abraham who had saved the people of those cities at the risk of his own life when he rescued Lot. Inasmuch as Abraham thought that these people were safe, God thought He owed it to Abraham to inform him about His plans for them. He did not have to spell out **what** it was that He would conceal from Abraham as this is self-evident.

V. 18

OR HACHAIM... *For Abraham is going to be a great nation...* Therefore I have to inform him that contrary to what he had thought, righteous people can save both themselves and the towns in which they live. This is the meaning of the last words in our verse, ונברכו בו כל גויי הארץ. The word **בו** refers back to the words "a great nation." One may ask: "of what use is this promise to the nation that will follow Abraham?" God answers: "For I am aware that he will instruct his descendants, etc." God knew that Abraham would endeavor to teach his children to be good and to do good and to inform them about the ways of the Lord.

V. 19

singled him out...

- **JPS...** He enjoys a special degree of intimacy with God. For this nuance of Hebrew *y-d-*, see Comment to 4:1.
 - Comment to 4:1: "Knowing" in the Bible is not essentially intellectual activity, not simply the objective contemplation of reality. Rather, it is experiential, emotional, and, above all, relational. Thus, in 18:19, when God says of Abraham, "I have singled him out" or to Israel, in Amos 3:2, "You along have I singled out of all the families of the earth," the true connotation is "I have entered into a special relationship with you." For that reason, the Hebrew stem *y-d-* can encompass a range of meanings that includes involvement, interaction, loyalty, and obligation. It can be used of the most intimate and most hallowed relationships between man and wife and between man and God. Significantly, the verb is never employed for animal copulation....
- **RADAK...** that Avraham is in awe of Me and loves Me. I intend for his children to develop in the same way. This is why I will inform him.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** Alternatively, the meaning of the word is that "I have supervised him closely." When God "knows" a person this implies that He keeps careful track of all that this person does and He protects him. The words **כי ידעתיו** single out Avraham from other ordinary human beings who do not enjoy the constant supervision by God of what they do and what happens to them. The righteous enjoy this advantage over their secular-oriented fellow human beings.... The words **כי ידעתיו** are words by God directed at man, i.e. God is informing our patriarchs that in order to qualify for this kind

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of benevolent supervision of their individual fates it is essential to be righteous. Once Avraham was aware of this he would have powerful incentive to command his offspring to observe God's commandments. This is spelled out in the words: "so that God may indeed bring upon Avraham all that He has promised him concerning them."...

instruct...

- **JPS...**In the Bible the education of the young is the responsibility of parents. The Hebrew phrase, not usually used in this context, literally means "he will enjoin . . . after him," Used here, it implies a charge made in anticipation of death and indicates that the inculcation of moral values constitutes the richest and most enduring of legacies.
- **CHIZKUNI...** He should point out to them that unless they followed their father's or master's tradition, they might wind up just as the people of Sodom would in short order. [Note that here as well as at the time of the deluge, God was not punishing these people for their paganism but for not dealing fairly with one another. Ed.]

RADAK...children and his posterity... both the members of his household who were not biologically related to his as well as his family, in order to teach us that a man is obligated to monitor the conduct of all members of his household and is responsible for their misconduct if he did not use his authority to put a stop to it....

to do righteousness and justice...

- **ALTER...**This is the first time that the fulfillment of the covenantal promise is explicitly made contingent on moral performance. The two crucial Hebrew nouns, *tsedeq* and *mishpat*, will continue to reverberate literally and in cognate forms through Abraham's plea to God on behalf of the doomed cities, through the Sodom story itself, and through the story of Abraham and Abimelech that follows it.
- **PLAUT...** Abraham's children will learn from the fate of Sodom that evil will be punished.
- **RADAK...** "...so that Avraham will say to his children that if they practice and emulate God's ways of performing charitable deeds and at the same time endeavor for justice to prevail, their lives will be successful seeing God will help them. They will then experience the fulfillment of all the promises (conditional) which I, God, have made to him concerning his offspring. If they fail to emulate that lifestyle these promises are liable not to be fulfilled." If there are among his children some who argues that God does not concern Himself with the deeds of individuals, as opposed to the conduct of nations, remind them of what happened to the Sodomites so that they realize that God does indeed watch closely over the actions of even small communities. In the event such non-believers would argue that what happened to the Sodomites was an accident of nature, an earthquake, such as we all experience in different parts of the earth, Avraham could reply that God had advised him of that event in advance so that it could not be explained away as a natural event.

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OR HACHAIM...*in order that God may bring about for Abraham...* in order that God would be able to fulfil for Abraham, etc. God announced here that the essential part of His fondness was not for Abraham's descendants but His fondness of Abraham personally. God's planning focused on how to ensure that He could fulfil all the promises He had made to Abraham concerning his descendants. Unless Abraham's descendants observed the paths of God this could not be guaranteed.

V. 20-22... JPS

The sin and cataclysmic punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah have converted the names of those two cities into a permanent metaphor of human wickedness and divine retribution. The first hint of the immorality of their inhabitants was the bare observation in 13:1; that they were “very wicked sinners against the Lord.” The narrative now speaks of “outrage” and “outcry” (so also 19:13). These two terms are identical; the Hebrew stems *z-’-k* and *ts-’-k* are simply dialectical variants of each other. They connote the anguished cry of the oppressed, the agonized plea of the victim for help in the face of some great injustice. In the Bible these terms are suffused with poignancy and pathos, with moral outrage and soul-stirring passion.... *Tse’akah* is especially used in connection with the suffering of the poor and the impoverished victims of avaricious exploitation.

The sin of Sodom, then, is heinous moral and social corruption, an arrogant disregard of basic human rights, a cynical insensitivity to the sufferings of others. The prophet Jeremiah identified Sodom with adultery, false dealing, and the encouragement of evildoers—all without any feelings of contrition (23:14)—while Ezekiel sums up the situation as follows in 16:49: “Only this was the sin of your sister Sodom: arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy. In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them. . . .” The indictment of Sodom lies entirely in the moral realm; there is no hint of cultic offense, no whisper of idolatry. As with the Flood story, the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative assumes the existence of a universal moral law that God expects all humankind to follow. The idea that there is an inextricable connection between the social and moral behavior of a people and its ultimate fate is one of the pillars upon which the entire biblical interpretation of history stands.

V. 20

the outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave...

- **OR HACHAIM...**the reason for the word **כי**, as well as the additional word **הטאתם**, plus the description **כבדה מאד**, require analysis. We must remember that in that era all the nations angered God by their conduct all the time. The wickedness of the Sodomites, however, was in a class by itself. This is indicated by the words **כי רבה**, "for it is great;" this explains why God seemed to mind the conduct of those cities more than that of any others. The additional word **והטאתם** alludes to the fact that their wickedness included not only the metaphysical, i.e. idolatry, but also moral-ethical wickedness in their relations with fellow human beings.... The Torah itself alludes to their attempts to have

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homosexual relations with the angels who visited Lot in the guise of human beings. God also wanted to cool Abraham's enthusiasm for saving such a wicked people. This is why He told him that their sins were both numerous and of a severe nature. Originally their sins were "merely" numerous i.e. רבה; meanwhile they had become "severe," כבדה, also. When Abraham rescued the Sodomites from the four kings their sins had not yet been that severe.

- **RADAK...outcry...** the souls of the people who had been tortured by the inhabitants of these cities reached the heavenly court. The primary complaint was violence committed against these people. There were other, lesser crimes committed by these people also. However, the decision to destroy these cities was sealed on account of the violence perpetrated, just as the deluge was brought about by that crime. This was essentially a repeat of what happened on a global scale at the time of the deluge.
- **RADAK...sin...** this refers to the sin of violence, taking the law into one's own hands. The outcry that had reached the heavenly spheres was extremely severe. As the prophet Ezekiel said: "they did not support the poor and the weak." The poor cry out to heaven on account of their hunger, and they do not have any one who stretches out their hand to support them.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA...** These verses (20 & 21) are closely linked to one another. It is as if the Torah had written: "the outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah and their sins which have become great are such that I have to descend and investigate if they are all guilty or not; if not all are guilty I will determine who the guilty ones are." The word הַטָּאָה in verse 20 covers a multitude of sins and negative characteristics. Our sages in Sanhedrin 109 have interpreted the word... הַטָּאָה as referring to sins committed by their bodies.... The word מְאֹד, "very much," refers to the sin of murder, bloodshed by indirect means....The sin which sealed the fate of the Sodomites was that they despised charity, i.e. they legislated against people who practiced the virtue of giving charity or being otherwise charitable. They did not even take care of their own needy who were suffering from hunger.

The meaning of our verses based on the simple explanation of the text is: "the men of Sodom were very evil and they sinned greatly against God, so much so that the echo of their sins reached the ears of God." ...We find a specific verse about the sins of the Sodomites in Ezekiel 16:49 "See! This was the sin of Sodom: pride, surfeit of bread, and undisturbed peace were hers and her daughter's but the hand of the poor and the needy she did not support. And they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. So I removed them when I perceived it." They were dealt with so harshly because they persisted in their evil ways more so than anyone else. There is no other nation on earth which does not practice some degree of charity towards its own members. The people of Sodom not only considered such an attitude as pandering to the economically unsuccessful, but they treated the victims with cruelty to boot. Even though the Torah and its social legislation had not been given as yet, the commandment of giving charity belongs to the group of commandments which one's intellect dictates, and it is something

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despicable when a human being watches another human being suffering from hunger without trying to relieve his condition. When God destroyed the people of Sodom He avenged the poor who had been allowed to die from hunger or whose condition had been deliberately aggravated by those people in order to accelerate their death.... The lesson to be drawn from all this is that wealth is not something that has been bestowed on the wealthy to do with what he pleases, but it has been given to him to test him if he knows how to handle it, how to employ it most usefully...

A Midrashic approach to our verse: The word רבה is understood to refer to a young and kind-hearted girl. According to tradition as related in Sanhedrin 109, this girl had been feeding a poor beggar in Sodom until suspicion fell on her because the poor (who had been given money but whose money had not been accepted by the local merchants in exchange for food and drink) had somehow refused to die. When it was found that she had indeed broken the local law by feeding the beggar she was bound, placed on the roof, smeared with honey all over so that the bees stung her to death. The outcry from that girl's (ריבה) soul came to God's attention and this is what triggered His reaction as described in our verse.

V. 21

I will go down to see...

- **JPS...** See Comment to 11:5. This stated intention is an element in the motif of theodicy, or the vindication of divine justice, that is essential to the Sodom narrative. As the wickedness of the city appears to reach intolerable proportions, God personally investigates the situation. The fate of the inhabitants of Sodom is not yet sealed. At this point, the humanity of Abraham is put to the test.
 - Comment to 11:5: God does not react capriciously; he investigates man's doings. The identical anthropomorphism, or depicting of God in human terms, appears again in 18:21 in connection with the divine scrutiny of the situation at Sodom and Gomorrah. This figurative usage implies no limitation on God's omnipotence, for the divine "descent" presupposes prior knowledge of human affairs from on high, and God's subsequent counteraction unqualifiedly exhibits His absolute sovereignty.... Scripture emphasizes God's infinite transcendence and incomparable supereminence by having God "go down" in order to scrutinize the scene.
- **RADAK...** This time the text says וּאֵרָאֶה, "I shall see," instead of לִרְאוֹת, "to see." The Torah writes in this vein although we know that God is perfectly aware of all that goes on here on earth. The reason why the Torah describes God's activity in this manner is only to remind people on earth that He is not in a hurry to mete out retribution, but is patient, and even when His patience is exhausted, He does not act impetuously, but is always in complete control. He examines if there is any way in which delaying retribution can be justified. It was this very phrase which provided Avraham with an opening to engage God in a dialogue concerning His Justice and man's perception of Divine justice. He did

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this not because he doubted God's justice, but in order to be able to teach man something about how God's justice works.

- **SFORNO...** I will allow their true colors to be seen by allowing them to attack Lot for his generosity. Then the world will know that it was not for naught that they were punished.
- **OR HACHAIM...** We need to understand why God had "to descend." Is not the whole world like a grain of mustard in size compared to God so that the term "descend" loses its meaning when applied to God? The word *הכצעקתה*, "if as its outcry," also needs clarification. Does God have doubts about the accuracy of His own knowledge? Rashi says that the word teaches that a terrestrial court must not judge capital crimes except on the basis of eye-witnesses....

God informed Abraham of the sequence in which he employs kindness and mercy with His creatures. Fairness would require that punishment takes into consideration the relative stature of the person who has been sinned against and that of the sinner. When a human being transgresses any commandment of his Creator, the Supreme Being, he and all his entourage deserves to be destroyed because of the stature of the One whom he sinned against. If God proceeds simply on the basis of the enormity of the crime because of the stature of the... one who has been slighted, the outcome of such proceedings is a foregone conclusion. If, on the other hand, God considers the relative insignificance of... the human being who committed the crime, and He bases the judgment on arguments presented by both litigants, things might appear in a different light. In such a case even the people of the generation of the deluge might not have been found guilty of extinction. This is why God explains here to Abraham *אֲרִדָּה נָא*, "I will descend, i.e. I will not judge on the basis of My superior stature." I will keep in mind the inadequacies of the sinners themselves.... God says: "If, after making full allowance for the inadequacies of any creature and ignoring My superior stature, the defendant still emerges as guilty, ...there is no escape for him. If not, I will know if they deserve to be judged by this or any other yardstick. God does not literally descend to earth to gain knowledge He did not have, but God lowers His profile in order to give the defendant an additional chance to downgrade his sin.

Another meaning of these words could be that though at the time God heard the outcry of the victims of the Sodomites and their guilt was then beyond doubt, He wanted to ascertain if their situation had remained the same and they continued their wicked lifestyle. The words *אֲרִדָּה נָא* then would indicate an immediate examination if these people had continued as before. If they intended to perform more such heinous acts their destruction would be imminent. This is why the angels spoke about destroying the cities in the present tense... (19:13). Until the attempt to sodomize Lot's guests, God used only the future tense about the fate of Sodom. Perhaps we may view the function of the angels in part as similar to that of the messengers of the court who warn a rebellious wife of the loss of her *כְּתוּבָה*, the financial settlement she receives in the event her husband dies or divorces her without cause. We learn from *Ketuvot* 63 that public warnings were issued

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four weeks in a row before action was taken in such a case. The proclamation was designed to induce the wife to change her ways. The same may have been the case here. When the Torah describes the journey of the angels (18:22) as *ויפנו משם*, "they turned from there," the reference may have been to the heavenly tribunal where the decree had been issued. This may explain the two successive statements *וארדה נא* and *ויפנו משם*.

destruction...

- **FOX...**Some read "altogether (according to its cry)."
- **ALTER...** Some construe the Hebrew noun as an adverb and render this as "done altogether." But the verb "to do" (*asah*) with the noun *kalah* as direct object occurs a number of times in the Prophets in the clear sense of "deal destruction."
- **CHIZKUNI...** If they really have acted as wickedly as the complaints that have reached Me;" while it is true that everything is an open book for Me, nonetheless the attribute of Mercy has requested that I exercise My power of Mercy for them.
- **RABBEINU BAHYA... outcry...** A Midrashic approach: the word *הכצעקתה* is unusual as we would have expected it to be in the plural, *הכצעקתם*, referring to more than one single outcry, complaint. It appears therefore that the Torah had in mind a special outcry, namely the one by the soul of the girl they had murdered in such a cruel manner (Bereshit Rabbah 49:6).

IBN EZRA⁹...if not, I will take note... I will have mercy on them and so too is explained "and God knew." And in my opinion, its interpretation should be, I will see if they are all this wicked. Because in truth, God knows things generally, not particularly.

V. 22

JPS... This seemingly intrusive note is really connected with verse 16. Here it makes for a slight pause in the narrative, as though to insinuate the idea of Abraham briefly struggling with himself as to whether he should plead the cause of Sodom or, like Noah before him, remain indifferent to the fate of his fellow beings.

the men went on from there...

- **TUR HAARUCH¹⁰...**According to Ibn Ezra, the line *ויפנו משם האנשים* "the men turned away from there" in verse 22 of our chapter, describes an event that preceded the conversation between Avraham and God introduced here. The whole verse has to be understood thus: After the men, i.e. angels, had taken their leave of Avraham, God said to him that the outcry about the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah which had come to His attention was such that, if upon closer examination, these reports would prove to be accurate, that would be the end of these cities. Thereupon Avraham began to pray on behalf of the innocent people in those cities.

⁹ Avraham ben Meir ibn Ezra (1089-1164 CE) was a Spanish Torah commentator, poet, philosopher, and grammarian.

¹⁰ Tur HaAroch, a commentary on the Torah, is written by R' Jacob ben Asher (c. 1269 - c. 1343), known as Ba'al ha-Turim.

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- **RADAK...** this is how it appeared to Avraham in his prophetic vision, i.e. that he had accompanied the angels some distance and after the appropriate distance, the angels turned in a different direction and went away. The angel who had brought the message to Sarah disappeared, whereas the other two proceeded in the direction of Sodom.

but Avraham still stood in the presence of YHWH...

- **FOX...**Some manuscripts read “But YHWH still stood in the presence of Abraham.” The subject of the sentence has been reversed by scribes who were uncomfortable with the passage’s human portrayal of God.
- **PLAUT...** Abraham begins the dialogue but God finishes it. In this verse “the men” are clearly distinguished from God. God had thus appeared as the third “man.”
- **RADAK...** he felt that the vision he had been experiencing had not yet come to a conclusion.
- **SFORNO...** Even after the angels arrived in Sedom he did not give up but remained standing in prayer and supplication.
- **RASHI...** But surely it was not he (Abraham) who had gone to stand before Him, but it was the Holy One, blessed be He, Who had come to him and had said to him, “Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great” and it should therefore have written here, “And the Lord stood yet before Abraham”? But it is a variation such as writers make to avoid an apparently irreverent expression (Genesis Rabbah 49:7) (which our Rabbis, of blessed memory, altered, writing it thus).
 - **SIFTEI HACHAMIM**¹¹... It is an emendation of the Scribes. This does not mean that the Scribes changed even one letter of what was written in the Torah, far be it. Rather, “emendation of the Scribes” denotes that they scrutinized each of those verses, and found that according to its context, its primary meaning cannot be as written in the text, but the verse bears a different meaning. Thus it should not have written, “Avraham was still standing,” but, “God was still standing” — except that Scripture changed the wording [out of respect]. It is called “emendation of the Scribes” only because they scrutinized it and commented that Scripture changed the wording. (*Rashba*¹²)

¹¹ Sifte Chachamim was a commentary on Rashi’s commentary on Torah. It was written by Shabbethai ben Joseph Bass (1641-1718).

¹² Shlomo ben Avraham ibn Adret, or Rashba, (1235-1310 CE) was a Spanish rabbi and Talmudic commentator.