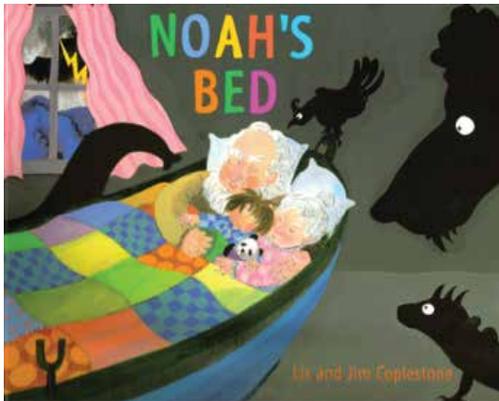




Global Day of Jewish Learning

Curriculum: Heroes and Villains, Saints and Fools



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The People of Sodom: The Making of an Evil Society

Written by: **Aliza Sperling**

Facilitator's Note: This class can be taught as either a 60-minute or 90-minute session, depending on your time limitations. For a 60-minute class, omit Texts #4 and #6. For a 90-minute class, include the texts and allow more time for discussion.

Introduction (5 minutes)

► Share this summary of the story of the People of Sodom (Genesis Chapters 13, 18–19).

In Genesis 13, Lot, Abraham's nephew, goes to live in the city of Sodom. The People of Sodom are described as "very wicked sinners against the Lord" (Genesis 13:13) though we are not privy to their specific transgressions.

The People of Sodom are next mentioned in Chapter 18, where God decides to tell Abraham what God will do with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. While it is not clear what their sin is, an "outcry" compels God to act. When Abraham hears of Sodom's fate, he enters into prayer asking God to save the people if a quorum of righteous people is found in the cities.

It is only in Genesis 19, after God decides to destroy Sodom, that we see two angels come to Lot's house in Sodom on the eve of the destruction. The People of Sodom demand Lot send the angels out, "that we may be intimate with them" (Genesis 19:5). Lot offers his daughters instead. But the two angels convince Lot to take his family and leave the city, in order that they not be destroyed with it; they leave. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed with "sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven" (Genesis 19:24).

► **Introduce the session.**

Lack of hospitality and sexual impropriety are oft-cited as the "sin of Sodom", yet the text never clearly states their sin. We will examine biblical and rabbinic texts that suggest explanations for God's decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. What do these texts teach us about the People of Sodom?

In this session, we will encounter the People of Sodom. We will reflect on why it is so important for Abraham and his descendants to know about the People of Sodom, their philosophy and their ultimate downfall. We will further consider how Jewish law safeguards us from their value system.

Part One: God Tells Abraham About Sodom (7 minutes)

► **Ask your participants to form groups of two or three for the *chevruta* style of learning. *Chevruta*, or partnered learning, has the added benefit of two people sharing ideas and insights as they learn together.**

► **Ask your *chevruta* pairs to read Text #1 together and discuss the questions that follow.**

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Text #1: Genesis 13:13, 18:17–21

בראשית יג, יג

וְאֵנָשִׁי סֹדֶם רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים לֹה' מְאֹד:

בראשית יח, יז-כא

(יז) וְה' אָמַר הַמְכֹסֶה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה:

(יח) וְאַבְרָהָם הָיָה יִקְוֶה לְגֹי גָדוֹל וְעַצוֹם וְנִבְרָכוּ בוֹ כָּל גְּוֵי הָאָרֶץ:

(יט) כִּי יִדְעִיתִי לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְנֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אֲחֲרָיו וְשִׁמְרוּ דְרָבְךָ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא יִקְוֶה עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר עָלָיו:

(כ) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' וְעַקֵּת סֹדֶם וְעַמּוֹרָה כִּי רָבָה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד:

(כא) אֲרִדָּה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה הַכְּצַעְקוֹתֶיהָ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ כָלָה וְאִם לֹא אֲדַעָה:

13 Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.

17 Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, **18** Since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? **19** 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 (*tzedakah u'mishpat*), in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” **20** Then the LORD said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! **21** 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.”

➤ Ask:

1. What was the sin of Sodom? Can you find any clues in the text?
2. Why is it important for Abraham to know what is going to happen to Sodom? How do you understand God's rationale for informing Abraham?
3. What must Abraham teach his descendants about this incident?

What does God want Abraham to understand about *tzedakah u'mishpat*? What does *tzedakah* mean? It's more than charity; it's going beyond the letter of the law (*mishpat*) to protect the vulnerable. It was this quality of *tzedakah*—defined in this context and not in its current meaning—that inspired many rabbinic commentaries and midrashim.

The text shows that God wants Abraham to “keep the way of the LORD by doing what is just and right (*tzedakah u'mishpat*)” and implies that Abraham must understand the sin of Sodom and its punishment in order to accomplish this.

Part Two: The Wickedness of Sodom (20 minutes)

The following sources offer explanations of the sin of Sodom and the “cries” that ascended to God as a result of its evils.

- Ask participants to read Texts #2–4 in *chevruta* in order to understand the wickedness of Sodom. After reading each text, have the *chevruta* pairs briefly summarize its message. After reading all these texts, ask participants to answer the reflective questions.

Text #2: Ezekiel 16:49–50

יחזקאל פרק טז, מט-נ

מט) הנה זה היה עון סדום אחותך גאון שבעת לחם ושלות השקט היה לה ולבנותיה יד עני ואביון לא
החזיקה:
נ) ותגבהינה ותעשינה תועבה לפני ואסיר אתהן כאשר ראיתי:

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. 50 In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them, as you saw.

Text #3 was written by Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, a 1st–2nd century commentator. He is frequently cited as Rabbi Eliezer in the Mishnah and Talmud.

Text #3: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. *Midrash Pirke d’Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 25.* Translated by Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit*.

פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק כה

ר' יהודה אומ' הכריזו בסדום כל מי שהוא מחזיק בפת לחם עני ואביון ישרף באש פליטת בתו של לוט היתה נשואה לאחד מגדולי העיר וראתה עני אחד מדקדק ברחוב העיר ועגמה נפשה עליו שנ' עגמה נפשי לאביון מה עשתה בכל יום היתה יוצאה לשאוב היתה נותנת בכד שלה מכל מזון ביתה ומאכלת לאותו עני אמרו אנשי סדום העני הזה מאין הוא חי וכשידעו בדבר הוציאו אותה להשרף אמרה רבון כל העולמים עשה משפטי ודיני מאנשי סדום ועלתה צעקתה לפני כסא הכבוד באותה שעה אמר הב"ה ארדה נא ואראה אם כצעקת הנערה הזאת עשו אנשי סדום אהפוך יסודותיה למעלה ופניה למטה

They issued a proclamation in Sodom, saying: Everyone who strengthens the hand of the poor and the needy with a loaf of bread shall be burnt by fire! Pelotit the daughter of Lot was wedded to one of the magnates of Sodom. She saw a certain very poor man in the street of the city and her soul was grieved on the account. What did she do? Every day when she went out to draw water she put in her pitcher all kinds of provisions from her house and she sustained the poor man. The men of Sodom said: How does this poor man live? When they ascertained the facts they brought her forth to be burnt by fire. She said: Sovereign of all worlds! Maintain my right and my cause at the hands of the men of Sodom! And her cry ascended before the throne

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of glory. In that hour the Holy One blessed be He said: "I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to her cry which is come unto me"—and if the men of Sodom have done according to the cry of the young woman, I will turn her foundation upwards and the surface downward.

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109b. English translation [bolded] and commentary [unbolded] by Rabbi Steinsaltz in the forthcoming volume of *Koren Talmud Bavli*.

בבלי סנהדרין קט, ב

היה רבייתא דהות קא מפקא ריפתא לעניא בחצבא איגלאי מלתא שפיוה דובשא ואוקמוה על איגר שורא אתא זיבורי ואכלוה והיינו דכתיב בראשית יח (ויאמר ה' זעקת סדום ועמורה כי רבה ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב על עיסקי ריבה

There was there **one girl that would take bread out to poor people in a pitcher** so the people there would not see her. **The matter became known, they smeared her with honey and placed her on the wall** of the city. **The wasps came and ate her. This is what the verse says: "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorra is great,"** (Genesis 18: 20). **Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav:** The word "great" or Rabah alludes to **matters of the girl** (Rivah) who was killed due to this act of kindness. And due to this sin they were punished.

► Reflective Questions:

1. What themes emerge out of these descriptions of the wickedness of Sodom? What words would you use to describe Sodom's wickedness?
2. Why do you think the people of Sodom punish the compassionate so harshly?
3. According to these texts, what causes God to address the sins of Sodom? What is so important about these individual stories? How do they refine the general description of the sin of Sodom as stated by Ezekiel?

Part Three: The Attitude of Sodom (28 minutes)

From the texts that we have just studied, Sodom appears to be an incredibly evil, oppressive society. We will now look at the mishnah in Ethics of Our Fathers that describes the attitude of the People of Sodom.

- **The following mishnah may produce some discomfort in your participants, as most of us live in societies that are rights-based and centered on the principle of "mine is mine and yours is yours." How could this be the attitude of Sodom?**

Text #5: Ethics of Our Fathers 5:10. English translation from Soncino Press edition adapted by on1foot.org.

משנה, פרקי אבות ה':

ארבע מדות באדם האומר שלי ושליך שלך זו מדה בינונית ויש אומרים זו מדת סדום שלי שלך ושליך שלי עם הארץ שלי שלך ושליך שלך חסיד שלי ושליך שלי רשע:

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There are four attitudes in people: 1) One that says, "Mine is mine, and yours is yours." This is a neutral type; some say this is a Sodom-type of attitude. 2) One that says, "Mine is yours and yours is mine," is an unlearned person. 3) One that says, "Mine is yours and yours is yours," is a pious person. 4) One that says, "Mine is mine, and yours is mine," is a wicked person.

➤ Ask:

1. Which of these four attitudes best characterizes the society in which you live? Give examples.
2. Does the statement "Mine is mine and yours is yours" strike you as an evil statement? Or would you characterize it as neutral and reasonable? Does it surprise you that this is the attitude associated with the people of Sodom? Why?
3. Does this make our society wicked?

Rabbi Judah Loew was a 16th century scholar best known as Maharal. In his book *Netivot Olam*, Maharal describes the progression from an attitude of "mine is mine and yours is yours" to the violence and oppression that characterized Sodom.

Text #6: Maharal. *Netivot Olam: Netiv G'milut Chasadim*.

מהר"ל נתיבות עולם נתיב גמילות חסדים

כי מי שאינו רוצה לוותר בשום דבר הוא בא לדקדק כל כך עד שהוא בא לגזול ולחמס גמור כי מתחילה הוא מדקדק ואינו רוצה לוותר ובסוף כאשר יראה שום דבר שיש לו שום צר שהוא שלו הוא לוקח אותו בכח וכאשר הורגל בזה בא לידי חמס גמור כמו שתראה באנשי סדום שהיה זה מדתם שלא לוותר שכך אמרו רבותינו ז"ל שלי שלי ושליך שלך הוא מדת סדום

One who does not wish to act benevolently in any matter will come to be so strict until he ends up with theft and total violence. In the beginning he is strict and does not want to forego his rights [to his own property] and in the end when he sees anything that could possibly belong to him he takes it with force, and then when he becomes accustomed to this behavior he ends up [engaging in] complete violence [even when it does not belong to him at all]. For so we see with the people of Sodom for their character was to not forego their rights, as our rabbis said: "What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours is the attitude of Sodom" [Ethics of Our Fathers 5:10].

➤ Ask:

1. According to Maharal, what is the inevitable progression from a "mine is mine" attitude to complete violence and oppression?
2. Do you agree with Maharal that "mine is mine" is a dangerous attitude for a society? Why?
3. How might this text offer insight into the sins of poor hospitality and sexual violence that Sodom is best-known for? Could these be symptoms of a deeper issue?

Maharal believes that the selfishness of "mine is mine" is a slippery slope from protecting one's own self-interest to violence.

Rabbi Steinsaltz offers the following explanation of the attitude of Sodom and the implications of "mine is mine".

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Text #7: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. “Ethics and Halakhah.” *The Essential Talmud*.

“He who says ‘yours is mine and mine is mine’ is a wicked man; ‘yours is yours and mine is yours’ is a pious man; ‘mine is mine and yours is yours,’ this is the average, but there are those who say that it is a Sodomite rule [i.e., cruel].”

Tension therefore exists between the view according to the law, “mine is mine and yours is yours,” and blind adherence to the letter of the law in every event, which is “a Sodomite rule.”

There is an aggadic tradition that regards Sodom not necessarily as the center of wild and indiscriminate corruption but as a place in which the legislation was evil because of a combination of malice and excessive respect for the letter of the law.

If a man repents of an oral guarantee and goes back on his word, no court can force him to carry out his promise, but he is cursed: “He who punished the men of Sodom will punish those who do not keep their word.”

And, generally speaking, a man who insists on his legal right to deprive another of enjoyment when he himself has nothing to lose is accused of *midat Sodom*.

► Ask:

1. In your own words, summarize Rabbi Steinsaltz’s characterization of Sodom’s attitude.
2. In your opinion, is strict adherence to the letter of the law cruel or admirable? Why?

Part Four: Jewish Law—Radically Different (10 minutes)

Yaakov ben Asher, who lived in Cologne, France and Toledo, Spain in the 13th and 14th centuries, is known by the title of his work, *Tur*. Moshe ben Chayim Alshish, who lived in Safed, (Israel) during the 16th century, is known by the title of his work, *Torat Moshe*.

Text #8: Tur. *Yoreh Deah*, Laws of Tzedakah, 247. English translation adapted from AJWS, *Where Do You Give? A Tzedakah Curriculum*.

טור, יורה דעה, הלכות צדקה סימן רמז

ואל יעלה בלבו עצה לומר איך אחסר ממוני ליתנו לעניים כי יש לו לדעת שאין הממון שלו אלא פקדון לעשות בו רצון המפקיד וזה רצונו שיחלק לעניים ממנו.

A person should not ask, “How can I spare my money to give to poor people?” because he should know that the money is not his but rather a deposit with which to do the will of the depositor (God), which is to distribute some of it to the poor.

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Text #9: Torat Moshe. Commentary on Leviticus 19:9. English translation adapted from AJWS, *Where Do You Give? A Tzedakah Curriculum*.

תורת משה, ויקרא יט, ט

ולא יעלה על רוחך כי משלך אתה נותן לעני או כי מאסתיו מתת לו לחם כאשר נתתי לך. כי גם בני הוא כמוך, אך חלקו הוא בתבואתך, ולזכותך כוונתי לתת לו חלקו מתחת ידיך.

Do not think that you are giving to the poor from your own possession, or that I (God) despised the poor person by not giving him as I gave you. For he is My child, as you are, and his share is in your grain; and I have decided for your benefit to give him his share from your property.

➤ Ask:

1. How would you characterize the social attitudes reflected in these texts?
2. How is the attitude reflected in these texts radically different from “mine is mine and yours is yours” (as described in Texts #2-4)?
3. How might a person act if he or she realizes that all his or her belongings are a “deposit” from God? What kind of society could we create if we treat our belongings as deposits, rather than our own property?

Conclusion (5 minutes)

We have reflected upon the oppression that can result when we act according to the principle of “mine is mine and yours is yours.” We have considered the case study of Sodom, and reflected on why it is so important for Abraham and his descendants to know about the downfall of Sodom and its philosophy. We have considered how Jewish law safeguards us from this orientation by reminding us that all belongs to God, and is not really “mine” or “yours.”

➤ Ask:

1. What kind of society does God want Abraham to create?
2. In what ways has today’s Jewish community been successful in creating an ideal society? In what ways are we still working to build that society?

Abraham and his descendants need to know about Sodom when they construct their own system of justice. Sodom was built upon a system of absolute individual rights and a “mine is mine and yours is yours” attitude which ultimately lead to terrible acts of oppression and injustice. Abraham and his descendants must go beyond such a narrow orientation and construct a society built upon *tzedakah u'mishpat* (justice and righteousness)—looking beyond individual interests to help others.

Part One: God tells Abraham about Sodom

Text #1: Genesis 13:13; 18:17-21

בראשית יג, יג

וְאֵנָשִׁי סֹדֶם רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים לֵה' מְאֹד:

בראשית יח, יז-כא

(יז) וְה' אָמַר הַמְכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה:

(יח) וְאַבְרָהָם הָיָה לְגֹי גָדוֹל וְעֲצוּם וְנִבְרָכוּ בוֹ כָּל גְּוֵי הָאָרֶץ:

(יט) כִּי יִדְעֹתַי לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת בְּנָיו וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְשִׁמְרוּ דְרָוֹ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט לְמַעַן הִבִּיא יִקְוֶה עַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלָיו:

(כ) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' זַעֲקַת סֹדֶם וְעֹמֶרָה כִּי רַבָּה וְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְדָה מְאֹד:

(כא) אֲרָדָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה הַכְּצַעֲקָתָהּ הַבָּאָה אֵלַי עֲשׂוּ כָּלָה וְאִם לֹא אֲדַעָה:

13 Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked sinners against the LORD.

17 Now the LORD had said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, **18** Since Abraham is to become a great and populous nation and all the nations of the earth are to bless themselves by him? **19** 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 (*tzedakah u'mishpat*), in order that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what He has promised him.” **20** Then the LORD said, “The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! **21** 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.”

Part Two: The Wickedness of Sodom

Text #2: Ezekiel 16:49-50

יתזקאל פרק טז, מט-נ

מט) הִנֵּה זֶה הָיָה עוֹן סֹדֶם אַחֲוֹתָיךְ גָּאוֹן שְׁבַעַת לֶחֶם וְשִׁלּוֹת הַשֶּׁקֶט הָיָה לָהּ וּלְבִנוֹתֶיהָ יָד עֲנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן לֹא הִחְזִיקָה:

נ) וַתִּגְבְּהֶינָה וַתַּעֲשִׂינָה תוֹעֵבָה לְפָנַי וְאַסִּיר אֶתְהֶן כַּאֲשֶׁר רָאִיתִי:

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. **50** In their haughtiness, they committed abomination before Me; and so I removed them, as you saw.



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Text #3: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus. *Midrash Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 25.* Translated by Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit.*

פרקי דרבי אליעזר פרק כה

ר' יהודה אומ' הכריזו בסדום כל מי שהוא מחזיק בפת לחם עני ואביון ישרף באש פליטת בתו של לוט היתה נשואה לאחד מגדולי העיר וראתה עני אחד מדקדק ברחוב העיר ועגמה נפשה עליו שנ' עגמה נפשי לאביון מה עשתה בכל יום היתה יוצאה לשאוב היתה נותנת בכד שלה מכל מזון ביתה ומאכלת לאותו עני אמרו אנשי סדום העני הזה מאין הוא חי וכשידעו בדבר הוציאו אותה להשרף אמרה רבון כל העולמים עשה משפטי ודיני מאנשי סדום ועלתה צעקתה לפני כסא הכבוד באותה שעה אמר הב"ה נא ואראה אם כצעקת הנערה הזאת עשו אנשי סדום אהפוך יסודותיה למעלה ופניה למטה

They issued a proclamation in Sodom, saying: Everyone who strengthens the hand of the poor and the needy with a loaf of bread shall be burnt by fire! Pelotit the daughter of Lot was wedded to one of the magnates of Sodom. She saw a certain very poor man in the street of the city and her soul was grieved on the account. What did she do? Every day when she went out to draw water she put in her pitcher all kinds of provisions from her house and she sustained the poor man. The men of Sodom said: How does this poor man live? When they ascertained the facts they brought her forth to be burnt by fire. She said: Sovereign of all worlds! Maintain my right and my cause at the hands of the men of Sodom! And her cry ascended before the throne of glory. In that hour the Holy One blessed be He said: "I will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to her cry which is come unto me"—and if the men of Sodom have done according to the cry of the young woman, I will turn her foundation upwards and the surface downward.

Text #4: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109b. English translation [bolded] and commentary [unbolded] by Rabbi Steinsaltz in the forthcoming volume of *Koren Talmud Bavli.*

בבלי סנהדרין קט"ב

ההיא רביתא דהות קא מפקא ריפתא לעניא בחצבא איגלאי מלתא שפיוה דובשא ואוקמוה על איגר שורא אתא זיבורי ואכלוה והיינו דכתיב בראשית יח (ויאמר ה' זעקת סדום ועמורה כי רבה ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב על עיסקי ריבה

There was there **one girl that would take bread out to poor people in a pitcher** so the people there would not see her. **The matter became known, they smeared her with honey and placed her on the wall** of the city. **The wasps came and ate her. This is what the verse says: "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorra is great,"** (Genesis 18: 20). **Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav:** The word "great" or Rabah alludes to **matters of the girl** (Rivah) who was killed due to this act of kindness. And due to this sin they were punished.

Part Three: The Attitude of Sodom

Text #5: Ethics of Our Fathers 5:10. English translation from Soncino Press edition adapted by on1foot.org.

משנה, פרקי אבות ה':

ארבע מדות באדם האומר שלי שלי ושליך שליך זו מדה בינונית ויש אומרים זו מדת סדום שלי שליך ושליך שלי עם
הארץ שלי שליך ושליך שליך חסיד שלי שליך ושליך שלי רשע:

There are four attitudes in people: 1) One that says, "Mine is mine, and yours is yours." This is a neutral type; some say this is a Sodom-type of character. 2) One that says, "Mine is yours and yours is mine," is an unlearned person. 3) One that says, "Mine is yours and yours is yours," is a pious person. 4) One that says, "Mine is mine, and yours is mine," is a wicked person.

Text #6: Maharal. *Netivot Olam: Netiv G'milut Chasadim.*

מהר"ל נתיבות עולם נתיב גמילות חסדים

כי מי שאינו רוצה לוותר בשום דבר הוא בא לדקדק כל כך עד שהוא בא לגזול ולחמס גמור כי מתחילה הוא מדקדק
ואינו רוצה לוותר ובסוף כאשר יראה שום דבר שיש לו שום צר שהוא שלו הוא לוקח אותו בכח וכאשר הורגל בזה בא
לידי חמס גמור כמו שתראה באנשי סדום שהיה זה מדתם שלא לוותר שכך אמרו רבותינו ז"ל שלי שליך ושליך שליך הוא
מדת סדום

One who does not wish to act benevolently in any matter will come to be so strict until he ends up with theft and total violence. In the beginning he is strict and does not want to forego his rights [to his own property] and in the end when he sees anything that could possibly belong to him he takes it with force, and then when he becomes accustomed to this behavior he ends up [engaging in] complete violence [even when it does not belong to him at all]. For so we see with the people of Sodom for their character was to not forego their rights, as our rabbis said: "What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours is the attitude of Sodom" [Ethics of Our Fathers 5:10].

Text #7: Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. "Ethics and Halakhah." *The Essential Talmud.*

"He who says 'Yours is mine and mine is mine' is a wicked man; 'yours is yours and mine is yours' is a pious man; 'mine is mine and yours is yours,' this is the average, but there are those who say that it is a Sodomite rule [i.e., cruel]."

Tension therefore exists between the view according to the law, "mine is mine and yours is yours," and blind adherence to the letter of the law in every event, which is "a Sodomite rule."

There is an aggadic tradition that regards Sodom not necessarily as the center of wild and indiscriminate corruption but as a place in which the legislation was evil because of a combination of malice and excessive respect for the letter of the law.



The People of Sodom: The Making of an Evil Society

If a man repents of an oral guarantee and goes back on his word, no court can force him to carry out his promise, but he is cursed: “He who punished the men of Sodom will punish those who do not keep their word.”

And, generally speaking, a man who insists on his legal right to deprive another of enjoyment when he himself has nothing to lose is accused of *midat Sodom*.

Part Four: Jewish Law—Radically Different

Text #8: Tur. Yoreh Deah, Laws of Tzedakah, 247. English translation adapted from AJWS, *Where Do You Give? A Tzedakah Curriculum*.

טור, יורה דעה, הלכות צדקה סימן רמז

ואל יעלה בלבו עצה לומר איך אחסר ממוני ליתנו לעניים כי יש לו לדעת שאין הממון שלו אלא פקדון לעשות בו רצון המפקיד וזה רצונו שיחלק לעניים ממנו.

A person should not ask, “How can I spare my money to give to poor people?” because he should know that the money is not his but rather a deposit with which to do the will of the depositor (God), which is to distribute some of it to the poor.

Text #9: Torat Moshe. Commentary on Leviticus 19:9. English translation adapted from AJWS, *Where Do You Give? A Tzedakah Curriculum*.

תורת משה, ויקרא יט, ט

ולא יעלה על רוחך כי משלך אתה נותן לעני או כי מאסתיו מתת לו לחם כאשר נתתי לך. כי גם בני הוא כמוך, אך חלקו הוא בתבואתך, ולזכותך כוונתי לתת לו חלקו מתחת ידיך.

Do not think that you are giving to the poor from your own possession, or that I (God) despised the poor person by not giving him as I gave you. For he is My child, as you are, and his share is in your grain; and I have decided for your benefit to give him his share from your property.



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