

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

“Tzaddikim”- Magistrates Who Stand Up For Justice & Make a Difference

Abraham’s final protest to God against the destruction of Sodom was to go so far as ask they be spared if there would be found just ten “righteous” men among them. But the text doesn’t go on to explicitly say that there weren’t ten: Rather, it leaves us to conclude that for ourselves. The closest the text comes to stating that is to tell us that “all the people” from the youth to the elders, gathered round the house of Lot. If all, young and old, were indeed complicit in this, then obviously “righteous men” were not to be found. And, of course, the actual carrying out by God of the threatened destruction despite His promise to Abraham that they could be spared also leads us to conclude that obviously even those ten could not be found. But why does the text leave us to draw the conclusion for ourselves, and not say there weren’t ten more explicitly?

And you also have to wonder further about Abraham, as well: Why does he stop protesting God’s lack of justice in killing innocents after whittling down the number of righteous men to ten? Perhaps it is being implied that even before we are told explicitly that all of the people surrounded Lot’s house, Abraham realized their destruction was already a foregone conclusion, once the bargaining had reached the “magic number” ten. Once the bargaining reaches the number ten, Abraham gives up and maybe even he’s conceding defeat. Ten is a number which symbolizes some minimal political base, even if its just a faction of a polity. Ten can form a platoon, a tribune or minimal troop, and it can also be the number of justices on a court of law. Once Abraham realized God was willing to spare for even ten, Abraham realized that going further was of no use. The text doesn’t need to tell us there weren’t ten, because Abraham’s giving up means he concedes that God’s punishment of Sodom had been totally right and fully justified all along: Sodom as a polity was totally unsalvageable, utterly bereft of any minimal political body which could establish justice.

Was Lot among the righteous? Perhaps one could say that’s implied. There are those who refer to Noah with the Yiddish expression “Tzaddik im peltz,” the righteous man who just puts on a fur coat to keep himself warm rather than seeking to light a fire to save others, and some apply this to Lot, as well. Lot offers the angels hospitality, beseeching them to accept and stay with him, just like Abraham. Lot tries to save his guests, being willing to sacrifice his own daughters. But the food Lot offers his guests is not nearly as lavish as what Abraham offers. His guests accept his offer quite hesitatingly. And his attempt at negotiation against the intrusion of his neighbors in the manner he does bespeaks great weakness: To protect the guests whom he is duty-bound to protect, he negotiates to give up the daughters he is also duty-bound to protect: Placed in a situation where he feels he cannot fulfill his duties, he simply would trade one obligation for the other. His very vulnerability to the intrusion also bespeaks weakness: His neighbors neither fear any retribution from their society, neither do they fear any type of power Lot himself might possess. This description of Lot and his behavior, in contrast to Abraham, bespeaks Lot’s great weakness. And one of the meanings of “tsaddik” has to do with being a winner of a fight, being victorious in a fight. A tsaddik by definition must be a hero, even if he ultimately fails. His role ultimately is to be a magistrate, to serve as political leader and judge. And to bring about justice he must be strong, brave, and heroic. By contrast to the hero Abraham, Lot is pathetic. No, there was not a single “tsaddik” in Sodom, not even Lot, and Abraham himself already concedes that when he stops bargaining further. Had there been ten righteous heroes, they would have established some tribunal system which would have made some difference already, if only minimal. They would have taken some action, called out injustice, and made some stand for justice and societal standards of law and order. This pathetic character Lot, by contrast, has no interest in establishing justice in his society, unlike the brave magistrate Abraham, who heroically establishes law and order both locally and internationally, and even pleads for justice in Sodom. There are no Tzaddikim, no heroic, righteous magistrates, in Sodom. And this is readily apparent, for otherwise, they would have made a difference.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vayera

November 15-16, 2024 | 15 Marheshvan, 5785

SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 78 | Haftarah: p. 1060

Hertz: p. 63 | Haftarah: p. 76

Candle Lighting | 4:20 pm

Evening Services | 4:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

Friday Night Lights | Rabbi Soloveichik | following services | *5785 Season sponsored by the Julis Romo Rabinowitz family*

Young Professionals Shabbat Dinner | *for registered guests* | after Friday Night Lights | Elias Room

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Youth Groups & Junior Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Rabbi Soloveichik’s Special Shabbat Morning Shiur | following services | Levy Auditorium

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 3:30 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 4:15 pm

Habdala | 5:05 pm

Parent-Child Learning | 6:00 pm | with Baruch-Lev Kelman | Elias Room

Weekday Service Times

Mornings

Sunday | 8:05 am / Monday-Friday | 7:05 am

Evenings (Arbit Only)

Sunday-Thursday | 6:30 pm

COMING UP

If registration required, sign up at shearithisrael.org

Registration Deadline: THIS MONDAY, November 18

Co-sponsored by the Shearith Israel League

Shabbat Dinner & Conversation with Author Ross Perlin

in conversation with Louis Solomon, Parnas

Friday night, Nov 22 | after 4:30 Evening Services & Friday Night Lights

Sign up and receive a free signed copy of the book

In his fascinating new book, *Language City: The Fight To Preserve Endangered Mother Tongues in New York*, author and linguistics expert Ross Perlin documents a race against time to map overlooked and dying languages across New York City. Professor Perlin, a Lecturer at Columbia University, will share his fascinating insights about the languages many of us care most about. Attendees will have opportunities to interact in the many languages spoken by members of our linguistically rich and eclectic Congregation.

UWS Jewish Community Blood Drive

The Entire Week: Sunday, November 17-Sunday, November 24

Give throughout the week at a location nearest to you!

Shearith Israel, Lincoln Square, and other neighborhood congregations are together sponsoring this convenient local blood drive. See our emails for details.

Annual Thanksgiving Pack-A-Thon

in partnership with the Jewish Center, the Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints, West End Church, and Masbia

Thursday, November 28 | 9:00 am | Paved Paradise Pavilion

At this annual event, we will pack over a thousand nutritious food packages for those in need, and Masbia will distribute them to those who need them.

Help us feed thousands of struggling families!

Captains Needed

We always need take-charge folks to help with the Pack-A-Thon logistics! When you sign up, remember to check off jobs that you are able to assist with.

Thanksgiving Parade Viewing for Youth

Thursday, November 28 | 9:00 am | Portico

CSI Members: Free!

Pack-A-Thon donors of \$180 & up: Free!

Non-Members: \$50 in advance | \$70 at the door

COMING UP

If registration required, sign up at shearithisrael.org

Back by popular demand!

(Virtual) Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

FIRST FILM DISCUSSION: Sunday, November 24 | 4:00 pm | on Zoom

Sallah Shabati (1964)

All proceeds will be donated to help families of Israeli soldiers

All three films: \$21.00 | Single film: \$10.00

Check out the new season of our own mini virtual Israeli film festival. We are offering three Israeli films, one each in November, December, and January, each to be viewed at your leisure. Then we will come together on Zoom to discuss the featured film with our host Emanuel Cohn, an Israeli film lecturer, actor, and screenwriter, who has successfully led our series in previous years.

The discussion will include peeks behind the scenes and in-depth conversation as we explore the relationship between history, culture, and identity in each film.

A link will be sent to you to watch the film a week before the appointed date, together with a second link to join the Sunday discussion on Zoom.

Parent-Child Learning Returns!

For elementary school children & their parents or grandparents

Select Saturday Nights | 1 hour after Habdala

First Session:

THIS Saturday Night, November 16 | 6:00 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Mark your calendars for the rest of the lineup:

December 14 | 6:00 pm | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

January 4 | 6:15 pm | Rabbi Ira Rohde

February 8 | 7:00 pm | Dr. Pasha Kletenek, Head of School, MDS

March 8 | 7:30 pm | Ellin Cooper, Yoetzet Halakha

Sisterhood Jewelry-Making Workshop

Sunday, December 15 | 4:00 pm | \$25 per person

The Sisterhood invites you to a hands-on jewelry-making workshop with handcrafted jewelry designer Ofra Lerner of Ofra Jewels. Come make a Hanukkah gift for yourself or a loved one!

Parents and children can work together to create beautiful jewelry with real pearls, semi-precious stones, crystals, and charms.