

# Lech Lecha: Serving Humanity or Ruling Humanity

- Nisson Shulman.

Sodom and Avraham. An analysis. Racists and theories of race they use to justify supremacy. Different from Avraham, an Av Hamon Goyim to serve humanity. The UN forum for the big lies of the world...

## LECH LECHA: SERVING HUMANITY OR RULING HUMANITY

1. In the Ethics of the Fathers, traits of character are described. The open-handed tzadik who gives and brings others to give, the rasha who wants what others have. In the middle, between these extremes, there is midat Sedom, sheli sheli shelcha shelcha. But why? If this is so, why were the people of Sodom considered so wicked? After all, this is the principle of private property! What's so bad about it?
2. Veanshe Sedom raim vehataim laHashem meod. So attests the Torah. But the Midrash describes all their sins as against people! Why here, especially do we find that they sinned against Hashem? Shouldn't it be, raim vahataim libnei adam?
3. In this portion the commandment of milah, circumcision, is given to Abraham. When he was commanded to circumcise himself and all the males of his family, Abraham, says the Midrash, protested bitterly. Vayipol Avraham al panav... Our sages understand that he fell on his face as a protest. "Said Abraham: Until now passersby used to come to my door. Shall it be that now, when I shall be circumcised, passersby would stop coming to me? If so, O Lord, I don't want any part of it!" Why did Abraham protest? Why emphasize hospitality as part of his protest?
4. God's answer was to change his name! Avram to Avraham, promising that he would be an av hamon goyim. What does this answer mean? How did it reassure Abraham? Why do our sages insist that calling Avraham by his earlier name Avram a violation of Torah?

I believe that all these questions are linked. And the answer tells us much about Judaism and our relation to the society in which we live.

Indeed Sodom was wicked. The people's sin was truly against God - because their sins were especially against their fellow human beings. It is a principle in Judaism that God punishes nations more severely for sins against fellow humans. You can see this from the Torah account of the Tower of Babel vs. the generation of the flood!

"Said Rab Yohanan: Come and see how great is the sin of violence. For the generation of the flood violated everything, but their doom was finally sealed only because of theft and violence, as it is stated, for the earth was filled with robbery."

So in explaining their punishment the Torah stresses that their sin against their fellow man is also a sin against Almighty God. Therefore raim vehataim - laHashem meod.

5. Furthermore, SODOM was indeed wicked, but towards whom? Not towards all their fellow men! Their own citizens were treated well and justly! They were wicked only towards strangers! All the stories of persecution - the girl they tortured to death because she gave a crust to a poor man; the bed on which they made each stranger sleep which was either too long or too short, and to fit they stretched him or decapitated him...

Why? The theory of the master race! Racism! They felt they were better than others! No outsider may enjoy their plenty! Even though they have much and you have nothing! Sheli sheli veshelach shelach; We have no obligation to share, because the land is ours!

Now racists must justify their injustice. So they build up a theology of race. They create a philosophy of the supremacy of their own state. Pharaoh began his philosophy of government which enabled him to enslave us with his fear of treachery; Haman's philosophy was based on the difference of our people, so that he accused us to the king of being different, strange, a non-productive people. Of course, in our time we are tragically familiar with Hitler's theology of Aryan supremacy. The tool of such a philosophy is the big lie. If you repeat a lie often enough, it will grow to be believed.

6. The United Nations today is the forum for the big lies of the world. It is the big lie which has convinced the Pope, the media, and most people of the world that we made the Arab refugees homeless.

We had been treated to this big lie treatment during all the history of Israel and especially during this Intifada. Arafat was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the biggest lie of all! To claim – against all evidence – that he was a man of peace. And though today he is totally unmasked, still many go on believing it, because it has been repeated so often and because it is what they want to believe.

It is the big lie that has made the protocols of the Elders of Zion believed by so many and one of the most popular books of all time in Arabic, and it is the big lie that has spread the blood accusation and that has made even some Jews believe it! Once a Jewish boy approached me and said that he wanted me to tell him the secret sources about Jews using blood for Matzah, because – in his words – "Where there's smoke there must be fire..."

7. So it was in Sodom: As the Midrash says, Arbaah dayanei biSdom, shakrurai, zayfai, ... There were four kinds of judges in Sedom: Liers, forgers, justice perverters, language twisters. There were the Sodom theologians. They are the ones who define democracy as imperialism. Zionism as racism. Hamas as victims, terrorists as freedom fighters or militants and suicide bombers as victims of persecution. All this is necessary to support the racism of Sodom!

Abraham was the very opposite. He was the symbol and epitome of hospitality. His tent was open to four sides. Next week, in Vayera, we find him praying even for wicked Sodom and Amora... He even prayed for his enemies. He had deep compassion not only for souls, but also – and especially – for lives... Vayaavor Avraham baaretz. Says the Midrash, he wandered ever on and built altars to attract people, to find more people to help.

8. Now, at 99 years old, Abraham was commanded milah. He was appalled! So he falls on his face in protest, saying, “O L-rd, till now I was hospitable. Will I now become like Sodom? Must I close my doors? Must I become an exclusive, excluding people, caring nothing for humanity!”

The highest proportion by far of Nobel prizewinners are Jews! In Germany, before Hitler, we were 1/2 of 1% of German population, and 37% of Nobel prize winners! We built hospitals the world over, tending everyone. On the radio there was a program recently, describing how Hadassah Hospital treats Jew and Arab, friend and foe, alike!

I know there are those who say, as I have often felt, that perhaps we must tend Jewish needs first. But that is only because our resources are finite. Not because we reject the outside world! Sodom undoubtedly had hospitals, beautiful ones, but only for their own sick! So Abraham protests.

9. God answers: You misunderstand. The covenant that I establish with you is not one of national pride. Ani hine beriti itach, vehayita leav hamon goyim.

I am the one who makes this covenant with you! You shall remain steadfast in your love of humanity. You shall remain an av hamon goyim, the father of a multitude of nations. Not Avram, “the exalted father”, but Avraham... “the father who cares for multitudes.

You will teach your son beYitzchak yikare lecha zera... What will you teach him? laasot tzedaka umishpat, To all people on earth...

And Abraham is reconciled. For he knew that by choosing Israel above all other nations God did not give us a goal of power, sway or might, but rather a role of service to our fellow human beings.

10. We have given the world so much. Karl Marx a descendant of Maharam Shif. Rose Luxemburg of the Pney Yehoshua. For by nature the Jewish heart is compassionate. Yehuda Halevi said the Jew is the beating heart of humanity. I prefer to say the Jew possesses a human heart. Even towards animals. The Noda Biyehuda, in a Teshuva, wrote that hunting is not a Jewish occupation. Einstein told of a discussion with Walter Rathenau, then Chief of the German Reichstag, an extremely assimilated Jew who was assassinated by Nazis on their way to power. "Rathenau declared," said Einstein, "that when a Jew says he is going hunting for pleasure, he lies!"

This message was always on our hearts and tongue. The world won't listen, but we won't stop teaching. venivrech becha... One day, Venivrech becha kol mishpechot haadama! And humanity will become human again!

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Submitted by Nisson E. Shulman in 5764