­­Chapter 18, verse 1

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יהוה בְְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְְְרֵא וְְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל כְְּחֹם הַיּוֹם׃

The Lord appeared to him by the Oaks of Mamre as he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day.

Or Haḥayyim

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יהוה – The Lord appeared to him: When he appeared to Avraham, God revealed the Divine Presence to him [in such a way that the divine presence remained with Avraham permanently]. This explains the word order in the verse which states: *vayeira eilav Adonai*. [Literally: “.” In contrast, the alternative word order, *vayeira Adonai eilav,* [literally, “and appeared the Lord to him,”] would not imply this, since in that order God would separate between the revelation and the recipient of the revelation. Understand this well. The fact that the verb *vayeira* is never again used to describe God’s revelation to Avraham supports this. Instead, the text always reads, *vayomer Adonai* [“and the Lord said.”] Once God had revealed Himself to Avraham as described in this verse, His glory remained ever present with him like a diadem upon his head.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יהוה – The Lord appeared to him: Outsiders often slander Judaism and its adherents. They besmirch the legacy of Avraham and those who have inherited it by falsely characterizing us. These detractors claim to understand us and say: Look at the arrogance of those circumcised Hebrews, parading around as if they are God’s chosen people. They refuse to join with others who are not as holy as they believe themselves to be. Hence, Jews lack empathy or unity with the rest of humanity. According to the Jews, God is interested only in the affairs occurring in their tiny strip of territory, to the exclusion of everything else! Is there any truth to this evaluation? Look at the first circumcised Jew! Has he sequestered himself in a cave with God? No, here he sits by the Oaks of Mamre, eager for human interaction. He craves the company of his friends Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre – individuals who had not been included in Avraham’s covenant with God. Despite the fact that Avraham had by now circumcised himself, his relationship with his companions has not changed. In fact, the Sages teach that Avraham’s concern for others led him to the door of his tent on that hot day. They wish to emphasize that it is more important to welcome human guests into one’s home than it is to greet the divine presence. Consider the three men who appeared on Avraham’s doorstep. They were of course uncircumcised, even idolators for all Avraham knew! Yet, Avraham was prepared to leave the presence of God and to rush out to fulfill the commandment of extending kindness to strangers.

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יהוה – The Lord appeared to him: The opening to this chapter reveals that   
Avraham possessed some kind of inner spiritual understanding of God. Avraham’s sense of sight saw three men approaching him through the haze, but his awareness of the metaphysical detected the presence of God as well. Avraham was unaware that this supernatural ability was linked to his external power of vision. Nor did Avraham have any way of knowing that the visitors he saw were angels. Despite the fact that he was experiencing an ecstatic prophecy, Avraham still leapt to his feet to extend hospitality to the strangers.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יהוה – The Lord appeared to him: There is no “And God spoke to Avraham,” no message, no command, no law, no promise. God simply came to see him. If two individuals are close friends, sharing a sense of intimacy and companionship, one need not have a message to deliver in order to walk into the other’s home. The highest form of friendship does not require words. בְְּאֵלֹנֵי מַמְְְרֵא – By the Oaks of Mamre: Avraham feared that after he circumcised himself, people would avoid him because he would be different and unique. Mamre encouraged Avraham, telling him: Whether you will be circumcised or not, you will not lose my friendship. יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל – Sitting at the entrance to his tent: Our text hints that Abraham’s worries may have been justified. In the past, people had flocked to him. Now, after his circumcision, people seemed to be deserting him. This is evidenced by the fact that Avraham set up a chair outside his tent in order to watch for wayfarers.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Through circumcision, Avraham’s body became refined enough to witnessed God’s revelation. In fact , it was now capable of withstanding an even loftier revelation than Avraham had ever before experienced. Of all the commandments, circumcision is the only one able to affect the body in this way, because it is the only one that visibly and permanently alters the physical body. Furthermore, specifically because it sanctifies the physical flesh – which is otherwise the driving force behind our basest impulses –circumcision accomplishes God’s purpose in creating the world, which is to transform it into a home for divine content. Circumcision, therefore has the power to elicit the most sublime levels of Divine revelation.

Verse 2

וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְְְא וְְהִנֵּה שְְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים נִצָּבִים עָלָיו וַיַּרְְְא וַיָּרָָץ לִקְְְרָאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְְְׁתַּחוּ אָרְְְצָה׃

Avraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. The moment he saw them, he ran from the opening of his tent to greet them, and bowed down low to the ground.

Or Haḥayyim

שְְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים נִצָּבִים עָלָיו – Three men standing nearby: The three visitors appeared to be men so that Avraham would invited them into his home. Still, Avraham had no trouble identifying them as angels of God. Avraham knew what angels looked like, and it was unnecessary for them to disguise themselves. Indeed, even Manoaḥ’s wife [whose encounter with an angel is described in Judges chapter 13] could tell that she had met an angel, despite its outwardly human appearance. How much more so was Avraham aware of who his guests were. This is because Avraham had had previous experience with spiritual entities.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיַּרְְְא – Avraham looked up and saw: One interpretation is that God revealed Himself to Avraham while he was busy welcoming his guests. Alternately, Avraham walked away from his encounter with God in order to fulfill the commandment of hospitality. Either way, this episode teaches us something valuable about the nature of prophecy in Israel. Many people confuse prophecy with magic or illusion, and they consider the experience to be one of ecstatic wonder. According to this understanding, the state of euphoria leads to prophecy, meaning that prophecy is merely one step higher than the rapture which facilitated it. There are even some Jewish philosophers who characterize the phenomenon of prophecy in this way, claiming that the practice of meditation is sufficient to induce communication from above. These thinkers believe that isolation as well as the shedding of a person’s spatial and intellectual awareness can somehow summon a message from God. In truth, a yawning chasm separates that description from the true essence of prophecy. Abstract musings cannot draw a person closer to God. Rather, the dynamic embrace of life leads one to a deeper connection with God. Furthermore, prophecy in Israel is not the product of an ailing imagination or the result of a deluded mental state. Quite the contrary, God addresses people only when they are of healthy mind and temperament, when they are content with the thrill of life. Thus, the Sages maintain that the divine presence will not rest upon a person who suffers from sadness, displays laziness, or exhibits laughter or frivolity. God will not visit a person in the midst of meaningless conversation or idle chatter. Instead, God connects to people who celebrating the joy of fulfilling the commandments. This narrative perfectly illustrates this principle. Avraham entered a state of prophecy when he was completely clear–headed and occupied with kindness. He is not the least bit delusional or unstable when God arrived to speak with him.

Malbim

שְְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים נִצָּבִים עָלָיו – Three men standing nearby: What does the phrase *nitzavim alav* [literally: “standing above him”] suggest? The three visitors stood at the peak of the world, from where they emerged. These celestial beings then assumed human form, so that one could detect them using the natural senses rather than prophecy. Hence, the verse twice states that Avraham saw the visitors. The second time he glimpsed the angels, he viewed them as regular travelers passing in front of his tent.

Haamek Davar

וַיָּרָָץ לִקְְְרָאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל – He ran from the opening of his tent to greet them: Avraham did not act in the way one customarily behaves when welcoming an important guest. Normally, a host leaves the house and slowly and solemnly walks toward the approaching visitor. As the two parties get closer, the homeowner speeds up and runs towards the guest. For example, the verse about Lavan states: When Lavan heard the news about Yaakov, his sister’s son, he ran to meet him (29:13). In contrast, Avraham did not act this way, because he was guided by the desire to fulfill a commandment of hospitality, and it is proper to run all the way from the house until reaching the traveler. This is why the text emphasizes that Avraham ran from the opening of his tent to greet them.

Verse 3

וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְְּעֵינֶיךָ אַל־נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְְְדֶּךָ׃

He said, “My lords, if I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by.

Or Haḥayyim

וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי – He said, “My lords”: [Despite referring to “my lords’ in plural,] why did Avraham then speak to only one of the visitors rather than all three? According to the Sages, Avraham spoke to the leader of the three angels, and meant to include the others. However, that is not the straightforward meaning of the text. For if Avraham had only spoken to one of the three, how did the whole group understand that they were invited into Avraham’s home? Instead, the meaning is that Avraham did address one angel because he deduced that the other two were intent on entering his home even without an invitation. Avraham sensed that these two angels had come to tend to him. One of the visitors was tasked with healing Avraham after his circumcision, while the other came to inform Avraham and Sara about the impending birth of Yitzḥak. Since these angels had been dispatched by God, there was no need to welcome them inside. However, the third member of the group was the angel Gavriel, and his mission was to go to Sedom and destroy it. His presence at Avraham’s tent would not benefit Avraham or Sara. Therefore, Avraham asked this third angel to turn off the road and to join the other two travelers in his house. Gavriel was persuaded by Avraham’s eagerness, and he accepted his offer.

Malbim

וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי – He said, “My lords”: How did these angels adopt human form, such that they appeared to lean against Avraham’s tree and partake of his food and drink? According to the kabbalists, when celestial angels descend to earth, they become sheathed in a body of flesh and they appear as people. Rabbi Yitzḥak Abarbanel poses several questions regarding this transformation. First, where do these angels procure these temporary shells, and what becomes of the human husks when the angels return to the heavens? Second, why is it that only those individuals who are exposed to the vision are able to see these faux people, and not simply anybody who looks at them, given that they appear exactly like the rest of us? Because of these doubts, Abarbanel maintains that in fact angels do not really exist in three dimensions. Rather, they are part of an apparition that God displays to men or women with whom He is communicating. They are part of a wondrous mirage which selected people are allowed to glimpse. He explains that these sightings do not occur inside a person’s imagination; they really do appear as a hazy sort of image. This approach is also unsatisfying, since if the angels did not possess some material existence, these visions would be the equivalent of the delusions of a deranged person, and they would have no basis in reality. Instead, the straightforward meaning is that people do in fact witness actual angels, and these angels exist outside of the prophets’ minds. These figures are not imaginary, and they do not appear only in visions. In this case, the angels consumed curds, milk, and beef. They lifted these foods from the table and brought them to their mouths. This was neither an illusion nor a figment of Avraham’s imagination. Still, the fact that angels take on substance when they enter our realm is foreign to gentile philosophers who have always maintained that these beings are actually disembodied intellects. In contrast, the Kabbalists and some of our own philosophers explain that angels do possess some kind of material form, although it is based on the element of fire or air. Indeed, Avraham ibn Ezra, Yehuda Halevi’s *Kuzari*, Rabbi Shlomo ibn Gevirol, and many others accept the physicality of these beings. Still, the angels that were sent to Avraham were not composed of a thin construct of air. Since the faces of angels resemble those of human beings, when they descend to our world and take on the appearance of regular people, they then become physically embodied, which of course can be observed by anybody who encounters them. This explanations answers Abarbanel’s question: Why were the angels not visible to people other than Avraham and Sara? The fact is that they were. Indeed, the citizens of Sedom watched as the angels entered Lot’s home. They assumed that the visitors were men of flesh and blood. Just as the blind person must rely on his sighted guide to describe what he himself cannot see, so too must we trust the Torah in matters of prophecy. The righteous person lives by his faith.

Verse 4

יֻקַּח־נָא מְְעַט־מַיִם וְְרַחֲצוּ רַגְְְלֵיכֶם וְְהִשָּׁעֲנוּ תַּחַת הָעֵץ׃

Let a little water be brought so that you can wash your feet and rest under the tree.

Or Haḥayyim

יֻקַּח־נָא מְְעַט־מַיִם – Let a little water be brought: It is polite for a host to downplay the efforts made on behalf of guests so as not to embarrass them.

Malbim

יֻקַּח־נָא מְְעַט־מַיִם – Let a little water be brought: Once Avraham saw the angels in human form, he treated them as he would any other travelers that might come his way. Avraham regularly acted generously towards travelers, and he would offer them food as he taught them to thank God for their meal. Indeed, Avraham mastered the art of combining the material needs of his guests with spiritual lessons about God. That was Avraham’s entire goal. He would always invite guests to enter his home for rest and respite from the sun, even when those guests might seem uninclined to stop. Avraham differed from the average person who gives charity to the poor out of a sense of pity. That person only acts when the destitute victim is starving for food and when that unfortunate creature begs for assistance. The rich patron will only donate to somebody who is in dire need, but not to anybody who asks for help. Who among us will initiate an effort to detain a rushing needy person and insist that the poor individual stop long enough to receive our largesse? Will you or I bow down to impoverished people, begging them to come into our homes and indulge in our food? This then was the supreme kindness and morality of Avraham, who made the wayfarers feel that they were doing him a favor by eating his bread! Avraham constantly assured the visitors that he would only keep them long enough for them to wash their feet and to rest a bit under his tree. After all, would they not indulge in such activities on their own were they to chance upon a spring or a shady grove? Therefore, argued Avraham, he was not really doing anything all that significant for his guests.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

יֻקַּח־נָא מְְעַט־מַיִם – Let a little water be brought: The cruelty of Sedom is portrayed in terms of cruelty to guests and strangers; in contrast, Avraham’s kindness expressed itself particularly in *haḥnasat orḥim.* There are many ways to practice kindness. Why is *haḥnasat orḥim*, the commandment to welcome guests, so emphasized here? *Haḥnasat orḥim* is often for the poor. A rich man is in no need of hospitality; he can find an inn or a place to stay. Yet *haḥnasat orḥim* differs from *tzedaka* [“charity”], or material help to others, in a crucial way. Giving *tzedaka* demonstrates sympathy. *Haḥnasat orḥim*, however, demonstrates full human equality, the belief that every being has dignity and is just as important as any other. It is much easier to give people money and send them away than to invite them under your own roof. If I invite people in, that means that no matter what their station in life, I am treating them with respect, as equals. *Haḥnasat orḥim* is symbolic of our personal relationships, the understanding that all Jews are princes regardless of differences in wealth or knowledge. That is why the Torah gives us this picture of Avraham.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

יֻקַּח־נָא מְְעַט־מַיִם – Let a little water be brought: When offering hospitality to guests, a host must do much more than merely proffer a free meal. The host must focus fully on the guests and their needs, display sincere concern for their welfare and comfort, take an interest in their conversation, and in general make them feel at home. Avraham was the paradigm of such sensitivity to others; in the very midst of a conversation with God, he took notice of three travers and excused himself from God’s presence to tend to their needs.

Verse 6

וַיְְְמַהֵר אַבְְְרָהָם הָאֹהֱלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מַהֲרִי שְְׁלֹשׁ סְְאִים קֶמַח סֹלֶת לוּשִׁי וַעֲשִׂי עֻגוֹת׃

Avraham rushed to Sara in the tent and said, “Hurry – three measures of fine flour: knead it and bake bread.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

שְְׁלֹשׁ סְְאִים קֶמַח סֹלֶת – Three measures of fine flour: This is the only place in the Torah where the terms *kemaḥ* and *solet* appear together. The first word usually refers to regular flour, whereas *solet* describes superior flour. But *kemaḥ* is not coarser than *solet*, as the Talmud makes clear regarding the Temple, where sacrificial *kemaḥ* would be sifted repeatedly. The coarse *solet* would be left in the sieve, while the inferior but finer *kemaḥ* would pass through the sieve like a thin dust. Similarly, the Mishna compares the best sort of pupil to a sieve, which lets the flour dust [*kemaḥ*]fall through its mesh while retaining the more valuable *solet*. We also learn in *Menaḥot* that the showbread loaves were baked with a tenth of an ephah [a measurement] of *solet*, which wasobtained from a larger batch of a third of an ephah of *kemaḥ* [also called one seah]. Additionally, one tenth of an ephah of *solet* equals an *omer*, which is the daily ration for a person. Based on this, Avraham instructed Sara to hurry and sift *solet* from three seah of *kemaḥ*, such that each guest would be given one tenth of an ephah. That is a sizeable portion for a generous host like Avraham to serve his visitors. [If one–third of an ephah, meaning one seah, of *kemaḥ* produces one–tenth of an ephah of *solet*, then three–thirds of an ephah,or three seah, of *kemaḥ* will produce three–tenths of anephah, or enough *solet* for each of the visitors to receive an individual loaf of *solet* bread.]

Verse

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman

וְְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכֵלוּ – Standing by them as they ate, under the tree: Proper eastern etiquette frowns upon a host sitting next to his honored guests as they eat. Instead, the homeowner should stand next to the guests in order to serve them and fulfill their every need. Now, according to the Sages, the angels only pretended to eat and drink. This is also the opinion of Flavius Josephus and of Philo. However, Tosafot cite *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* which maintains that, out of respect for Avraham, the visitors did indeed consume the food and drink that they were served.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

ַיִּקַּח חֶמְְְאָה וְְחָלָב – He brought curds and milk: Prior to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, fulfilling the commandments using physical objects was a spiritual exercise that did not imbue those objects with holiness. Only after the giving of the Torah did sanctifying the physical world became a primary and integral objective in fulfilling the commandments. In light of this fact, as far as Avraham was concerned, his fulfillment of the commandment of hospitality centered mainly on its spiritual aspect, i.e., the expression of the supreme desire to care for guests. The fact that the angels did not need his sustenance did not detract in any way from the objective value of his acts of hospitality.

Verse 9

וַיֹּאמְְרוּ אֵׄלָיׄוׄ אַיֵּה שָׂרָה אִשְְְׁתֶּךָ וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בָאֹהֶל׃

They asked him, “Where is your wife Sara?” “There, in the tent,” he replied.

Shadal

אַיֵּה שָׂרָה אִשְְְׁתֶּךָ – Where is your wife Sara: Would Avraham not have wondered how these strangers knew that his wife’s name was Sara? Perhaps not, if he had earlier referred to her by name.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַיֹּאמְְרוּ אֵׄלָיׄוׄ – They asked him: The letters *alef*, *yod*, and *vav* in the word *eilav* [“to him”] are written in the Torah with dots above them. Now, the angel’s question demonstrates the proper manners for a guest, who should always ask about the welfare of the lady of the house. She deserves the most gratitude for the hospitality. Nevertheless, the Talmud states that it is only appropriate for a man to inquire about a woman’s well–being by speaking to her husband. This appears to be the reason why the *lamed*, [a letter that as a prefix would mean “to”], in the word *eilav* is the only letter of the four which is unmarked by a dot. Even though it was polite for the visitors to ask about Sara, the question was not put to her, but to her husband.

Malbim

אַיֵּה שָׂרָה אִשְְְׁתֶּךָ – Where is your wife Sara: Although Sara was accustomed to hosting guests along with her husband, at that moment she was menstruating. According to the Sages, that explains why she did not serve the bread to the visitors. She began menstruating while she was kneading the dough, [which made her impure, and by extension any food she might touch]. Still, Sara was rejuvenated by the renewed youthfulness that returned to her. Since she was menstruating, she preferred to remain in the tent. That is why Avraham stated that his wife is there, in the tent, meaning that she is unable to come outside now.

Haamek Davar

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בָאֹהֶל – “There, in the tent,” he replied: The term *hinei* [translated as “there,” but which can also mean “behold”] generally introduces something new. Here, Avraham acknowledged Sara’s aloofness, in contrast to her usual practice of welcoming guests who entered her home. On this occasion she had just started menstruating, which is why she confined herself to her tent.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בָאֹהֶל – “There, in the tent,” he replied: Sara, the biblical woman, is modest, humble, and self–effacing. She entered the stage when she is called upon, acts her part with love and devotion in a dim corner of the stage, and then leaves softly by a side door without applause and without the enthusiastic response of an audience which is hardly aware of her. She returned to her tent, to anonymity and retreat. Only sensitive people know the truth. It is interesting that although Avraham survived Sarah by 38 years, his historical role came to an end with Sara’s passing. Isaac left the stage together with Rivka. Jacob relinquished his role to Joseph with the untimely death of Raḥel. Without Sara there would be no Avraham; no Yitzḥak if not for Rivka; no Yaakov without Raḥel.

Verse 10

וַיֹּאמֶר שׁוֹב אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וְְהִנֵּה־בֵן לְְשָׂרָה אִשְְְׁתֶּךָ וְְשָׂרָה שֹׁמַעַת פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְְהוּא אַחֲרָיו׃

Then one of them said, “I will return to you this time next year, and your wife Sara will have a son.” Sara was listening at the opening of the tent behind him.

Haamek Davar

שׁוֹב אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ – I will return to you: There is no doubt that Sara already knew about the discussion that God had had with Avraham [in chapter 17, in which God promised Avraham that his wife will have a son.] After all, Sara was aware that Avraham had circumcised himself and their entire household, and her husband had surely updated her regarding the change to both of their names. This means that Avraham must have told Sara about her impending pregnancy. [If so, what need was there for this visit from God’s messengers?] The only reason for the angels’ appearance now was to predict the date for that miraculous birth. When God told Avraham: Sara will bear to you this time next year [bashana haaḥeret, literally, “in another year,” 17:21], that did not predict a specific year. Sara and Avraham might have suspected that Sara would become a mother in only a few years! However, once the angel told her: I will return to you this time next year, the time frame for the birth became clear. וְְהִנֵּה־בֵן – Sara will have a son: At the time that I return to you, there will be a son. The angel pledged to arrive at the start of the birth, which the angel predicted would go smoothly.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

וְְשָׂרָה שֹׁמַעַת פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל – Sara was listening at the opening of the tent: It seems to me that this entire statement: I will return to you this time next year, and your wife Sara will have a son… behind him [vehu aḥarav], was uttered by the angel. [That is, “behind him” is part of the quote from the angel, rather than a description of Sara’s whereabouts.] Note that when Avraham circumcised himself, God used the terms “your descendants after you” three times to describe those included in the covenant. In this verse, the messenger is explaining that the son to whom Sara will give birth, will be the child who will be behind [that is, take after] Avraham. He is the boy who will take Avraham’s place. He will continue in his father’s footsteps, and he will be accepted as Avraham’s successor. In contrast, Avraham’s other children – Yishmael and the sons of Keturah – will not follow Avraham’s path in the covenant. Yishmael will be considered just “the slave’s son” (21:13), while the others are called “the sons of his concubines” (25:6). The reader might protest: If this understanding is correct, should the angel not have said *vehu aḥarekha*, meaning “and he will be behind *you*,” since the speaker was addressing Avraham? The text interrupts the angel’s pronouncement to describe Sara’s behavior during the conversation: Sara was listening at the opening of the tent. At that moment, the angel turned his attention to Sara and directed the last words to her, saying: Avraham’s son will follow him.

Verse 11

וְְאַבְְְרָהָם וְְשָׂרָה זְְקֵנִים בָּאִים בַּיָּמִים חָדַל לִהְְְיוֹת לְְשָׂרָה אֹרַח כַּנָּשִׁים׃

Avraham and Sara were already old, advanced in years; the way of women no longer visited Sara.

Malbim

חָדַל לִהְְְיוֹת לְְשָׂרָה אֹרַח כַּנָּשִׁים – The way of women no longer visited Sara: There is a distinction between the seeming synonyms *derekh* [“path”] and *oraḥ* [“way”]. *Derekh* connotes a public highway that is available to everybody, whereas *oraḥ* refers to a smaller route that leads away from the main road and is not as firmly established. Thus, Raḥel would later defend herself by arguing: I cannot get up for you, for the way [derekh] of women is with me now (31:35). Raḥel was relatively young then, and she still experienced regular menstruation. However, the description of Sara is different. Not only had she ceased to have her period in the manner – *derekh* – of younger women, she also never menstruated in the unusual way – *oraḥ* – that older women occasionally do. She was so old that all blood flow had stopped. The fact that Sara was now menstruating again was a sure sign that her youthfulness had returned to her, that her physical nature had been altered.

Verse

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַתִּצְְְחַק שָׂרָה בְְּקִרְְְבָּהּ – So Sara laughed to herself: Sara found it ridiculous that people were about to say that such an old and withered woman had her highest aspiration fulfilled.

Malbim

וַאדֹנִי זָקֵן – With my lord and old man: Sara noted that Avraham’s youth had not been restored to him. That meant that God would be required to perform great and novel miracles to make Avraham virile again. Those miracles, Sara believed, would necessarily deduct from Avraham’s future reward. In contrast, Sara found great happiness in the fact that she would not need another miracle to conceive. [Since Sara’s body had become youthful again, she would be able to become pregnant and carry a child without additional divine intervention.]

Verse 13

וַיֹּאמֶר יהוה אֶל־אַבְְְרָהָם לָמָּה זֶּה צָחֲקָה שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר הַאַף אֻמְְְנָם אֵלֵד וַאֲנִי זָקַײנְְְתִּי׃

Then the Lord said to Avraham, “Why did Sara laugh and say, ‘Can I really have a child, now that I am old?’

Or Haḥayyim

לָמָּה זֶּה צָחֲקָה שָׂרָה – Why did Sara laugh: The previous chapter reports that Avraham also laughed when God informed him that he will have a son, as the verse states: Avraham fell on his face and laughed; “Can a hundred–year–old man become a father?” He said to himself. “Can Sara, at ninety, bear a child?” (17:17). Yet, God did not rebuke Avraham for this. How did Avraham’s laughter differ from that of Sara? One approach to this difficulty appears in Onkelos’ Aramaic translation. In the first instance, he renders the verse as *veḥadi* – Avraham “rejoiced.” He translates this verse as *veḥaykhat* – Sara “smiled or smirked.” I do not agree with this distinction. Why would the Torah employ the same word in both contexts and trust the reader to understand them differently? Instead, I maintain that the correct interpretation views both responses as joyful. The Torah explains precisely why God was bothered by Sara’s happiness and not by Avraham’s. Avraham laughed immediately upon hearing the prediction of a son. In contrast, Sara did not express her emotion upon learning that she would become a mother. She only laughed when she witnessed the transformation of her body. The verse: So Sara laughed to herself, saying, “Now that I am worn out, can I have this pleasure?” [means that Sara expressed her amazement that she had begun menstruating.] Sara did not accept on faith the announcement of a child. She needed physical evidence before she believed that it would happen. That is why God took Sara to task.

Shadal

לָמָּה זֶּה צָחֲקָה שָׂרָה – Why did Sara laugh: Sara did not realize that the guest in her house was an angel. If she had known the truth, she would never have doubted the visitor’s message.

Haamek Davar

הַאַף אֻמְְְנָם אֵלֵד וַאֲנִי זָקַײנְְְתִּי – Can I really have a child, now that I am old? The Sages’ interpretation of this verse is well known and is cited by Rashi: God changed Sara’s words when He quoted her to Avraham in order to preserve marital harmony. [Although Sara wondered about Avraham’s age, God reported that Sara had identified herself as the old one.] Nevertheless, I find it impossible to accept that God would speak an untruth even for noble purposes. After all, did Sara not just ask: Can I have this pleasure? That question suggests that she knew that she has been rejuvenated. That is the opposite of her supposed claim to be too old! Thus, it seems to me that God repeated Sara’s astonishment at the idea that she would give birth as an old woman. God echoed Sara, who had said: I will not be giving birth as an aged mother, for my youth has been returned to me. How then will I conceive with Avraham who remains an old man? However, Avraham did not properly comprehend what his wife was saying. God had prevented that understanding in order to spare Avraham’s feelings. I have proposed a similar interpretation to the verse: Soon you shall see whether what I say comes true or not [Numbers 11:23, when Moshe seems to doubt God’s ability to feed meat to the entire nation.] There too, God obscured His true intention from Moshe for the sake of peace, as God did here in the case of Avraham.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

לָמָּה זֶּה צָחֲקָה שָׂרָה – Why did Sara laugh? In his introduction to the *Commentary on the Mishna* and in *Mishne Torah*, Rambam lays out the following doctrine: God might make a conditional promise. If the recipient changes, God might not deliver on His promise. This is why our ancestors sometimes feared that they might have committed a transgression which could undermine God’s promise. In contrast, if a prophet has been entrusted with a specific message, that message must be realized. This explains God’s lack of response in the previous chapter regarding the verse: Avraham fell on his face and laughed; “Can a hundred–year–old man become a father?” he said to himself. “Can Sara, at ninety, bear a child?” [17:17. God’s promise to Avraham could in fact be altered based on Avraham’s subsequent behavior. Hence, God did not chastise Avraham for his lack of faith, since the promise was not absolute.] However, when Avraham passed along this information to Sara, its content became definite, because Avraham acted as a prophet in that situation. Similarly, although God told Avraham privately that his wife’s name was being changed from Sarai to Sara, when he related that to her, the change became a final fact. Therefore, God rebuked Sara for laughing. She had received the news from a prophet. She should have accepted that when a prophet utters a beneficial pronouncement [in contrast to a threat] that will never be rescinded.

Verse 14

הֲיִפָּלֵא מֵיהוה דָּבָר לַמּוֹעֵד אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וּלְְְשָׂרָה בֵן׃

Is anything beyond the Lord’s powers? At the due time next year I will return to you and Sara will have a son.”

Or Haḥayyim

לַמּוֹעֵד אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ – At the due time next year I will return to you: The angel repeated the promise that the couple will have a child. This assured them that God had not changed His mind in response to Sara’s skepticism. God had rebuked Sara, which might have implied that He was withdrawing His promise. Hence, the messenger confirmed that God would fulfill His promise.

Malbim

הֲיִפָּלֵא מֵיהוה דָּבָר – Is anything beyond the Lord’s powers: With this statement, the visitor explained to Avraham the difference between those acts which God performs by way of an emissary or angel and those which God performs Himself without the intermediary. When God acts in this world through an angel, the angel must override nature, which of course is something God also does. God’s emissary must possess great merit in order to supersede the laws of nature. However, when God acts directly in this world, without resorting to an intermediary, His actions are not considered as great a wonder. God initially commanded the natural world to behave according to His rules, so it is simple for Him to now issue contrary instructions. This is the meaning of the verse: Is anything beyond the Lord’s powers? The entire world runs according to God’s word and decree. From God’s perspective, it is no more fantastic or miraculous for nature to run one way compared to another.

Verse 15

וַתְְּכַחֵשׁ שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר לֹא צָחַקְְְתִּי כִּי יָרֵאָה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא כִּי צָחָקְְְתְְְּ׃

Sara, because she was afraid, denied it: “I did not laugh,” she said. But He said, “Not so. You laughed.”

Or Haḥayyim

וַתְְּכַחֵשׁ שָׂרָה –Sara… denied it: The reader might protest: How is it possible for Sara to contradict God’s word? To preclude this objection, the text explains that Sara was afraid. Consider a loyal servant who cowers before the master and who has inadvertently committed some error in the household. What will happen when the owner of the house chastises the servant? At that moment, when the fear of retribution has welled up in the servant’s heart, the servant will find it nearly impossible to admit failure. Because the master’s wrath threatens to burst forth against him, the servant will be too terrified to confess, even if it would be better to do so. In fact, the servant’s denial confirms the master’s suspicions. Therefore, the verse reports Sara’s unbridled fear. Avraham responded that despite her dread, she should not deny her response, but should admit that she laughed. God truly wants people to express the truth, as the verse states: He who would cover up his sins will not succeed, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion (Proverbs 28:13).

Haamek Davar

וַתְְּכַחֵשׁ שָׂרָה לֵאמֹר – Sara… denied it, saying: There should be a pause between the two words *vatekhaḥeish Sara* [“and Sara denied it”] and the term *leimor* [“saying”]. That pause indicates that Sara did not immediately deny her reaction as soon as Avraham related to her what God had told him. Rather, she stopped and considered her response. Though she could have then admitted that she laughed because of Avraham’s great age, she was nevertheless afraid of insulting her husband that way. לֹא צָחַקְְְתִּי – I did not laugh: When Avraham told Sara about God’s displeasure, she denied laughing, which was true in the sense that Avraham had understood from God that his wife was laughing at herself. But in fact, she had been laughing about Avraham’s old age. Sara did not clarify the matter, and Avraham still had a misconception about his wife’s reaction to the news. וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא כִּי צָחָקְְְתְְְּ – But He said, “Not so. You laughed.” The straightforward meaning of this verse is that Avraham responded to Sara’s claim, saying: In fact, you did laugh. However, the Sages, explain that that was God’s response. This is consistent with my understanding of this passage. Avraham believed that his wife would not lie and contradict the word of God. Avraham was correct about that. God, in contrast, answered that Sara had in fact laughed, but that the laughter was about Avraham’s advanced age.

Verse 16

וַיָּקֻמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּשְְְׁקִפוּ עַל־פְְּנֵי סְְדֹם וְְאַבְְְרָהָם הֹלֵךְְְ עִמָּם לְְשַׁלְְּחָם׃

The men got up to leave and looked down toward Sedom. Avraham accompanied them to see them on their way.

Shadal

וְְאַבְְְרָהָם הֹלֵךְְְ עִמָּם – Avraham accompanied them: Avraham respectfully walked the men out of his home as they parted from him, in order to show his guests that he appreciated their company. Avraham did not actually accompany them along the road.

Malbim

וַיָּקֻמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים – The men got up to leave: Once the messengers had witnessed Avraham’s extreme hospitality and had enjoyed his kindness, the cruelty and indifference of Sedom came into stark relief. This is what the verse alludes to when it states: The men looked down toward Sedom. They gazed disapprovingly in Sedom’s direction. Though Avraham accompanied them to see them on their way, Avraham did not know the angels’ true mission. He did know however that the people of Sedom regularly accosted travelers. He escorted the men part of the way in order to protect them from what the people of Sedom might do.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

וְְאַבְְְרָהָם הֹלֵךְְְ עִמָּם – Avraham accompanied them: When we take the trouble to escort our guests on their way at the close of the meal, when our obligation as hosts is presumably over, we demonstrate that we were not acting out of mere obligation, but rather out of genuine interest in their overall welfare.

Verse 17

וַיהוה אָמָר הַמֲכַסֶּה אֲנִי מֵאַבְְְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה׃

The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Avraham what I am about to do?

Or Haḥayyim

אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה – What I am about to do: The verb *oseh* [“do"]should not be understood in the present tense [“what I am doing”], but as referring to the future. It means: “what I am about to do.” The Sages say that God revealed His plan to Avraham because Avraham had wondered about the generation of the flood. Why had God destroyed the world and not allowed the merit of the righteous people living then to save the planet? [God therefore discussed the fate of Sedom with Avraham to show him that there were no worthy people in the city for whom it would be justified to spare the city.] Based on this approach, perhaps the term *oseh* really means God speaking in present perfect tense: Shall I hide from Avraham that which I am accustomed to doing? Maybe I should demonstrate to him that I only destroy locations when they contain no virtuous citizens.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַיהוה אָמָר – The Lord said: When God commanded Avraham to keep the way of the Lord, He meant that the essence of circumcision is to walk before God in sanctity and purity and with noble attributes. The command to do what is right and just refers to acting morally towards other people, in the way that Avraham demonstrated by treating his recent guests hospitably. These two commands are in stark contrast to the practice in Sedom, where the inhabitants were wicked towards each other when they were not busy sinning against God. Note that Avraham was not commanded to instruct his descendants to observe the ways of the Lord *and* also to act rightly and justly. Rather, Israel’s mission is to: Keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just. The obligation of circumcision is God’s foundation for the construction of His nation, a point echoed later when, by and large, the ritual laws precede the civil statutes. In other words, the Torah first establishes the boundaries of holiness and purity needed to govern our bodies and our senses, and only then does the law turn its attention to interpersonal relations among Jews. This verse expresses the same priorities. Initially, a person must be trained to follow God’s pure and ethical ways, and only then learn to act righteously and justly. Only a person walking along the path of purity and holiness has embraced the conditions to be able to treat other people properly. Only a generation whose gestation, birth, and adolescence were guided by the *ḥukim* [“ritual laws”] is capable of creating a moral civilization. In short, the laws that form the basis of the Jew’s relationship to God are a prerequisite for those laws which mandate how we should behave towards one another. A generation which has abandoned ritual laws will soon lose social cohesion as well.

Verse 18

וְְאַבְְְרָהָם הָיוֹ יִהְְְיֶה לְְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְְעָצוּם וְְנִבְְְרְְכוּ־בוֹ כֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ׃

Avraham is about to become a great and mighty nation, and through him all the nations on earth will be blessed.

Haamek Davar

וכֹּל גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ – All the nations of the earth: When people from any other nation wish to understand something, they will have no need to consult with diviners or soothsayers. Instead, they will appeal to the prophets of Israel, who will advise them how to act. For example, in II Kings chapter 18, the king of Aram requested the counsel of Elisha. God also said to Yirmiyahu: I placed you as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5). The nations of the world, as they strive to understand God’s actions, will be blessed by the people of Israel. Corresponding to that future relationship between Avraham’s descendants and the surrounding nations, it is appropriate that in his own time Avraham was also aware of what was happening to his neighbors.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

לְְגוֹי גָּדוֹל וְְעָצוּם – A great and mighty nation: The phrase “great and mighty” is not to be understood literally , since Avraham’s descendants, the Jewish people, never became great or mighty, neither in numbers or power. Rather, the phrase means that each individual Jew is spiritually great and mighty, possessing all the strength necessary to transmit the message of Torah and goodness to the world. One of the manifestations of this promise is the immense contribution made by the Jewish people in all fields of human endeavor.

Verse 19

כִּי יְְדַעְְְתִּיו לְְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר יְְצַוֶּה אֶת־בָּנָיו וְְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו וְְשָׁמְְרוּ דֶּרֶךְְְ יהוה לַעֲשׂוֹת צְְדָקָה וּמִשְְְׁפָּט לְְמַעַן הָבִיא יהוה עַל־אַבְְְרָהָם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עָלָיו׃

For I have chosen him so that he may direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, that the Lord may bring about for Avraham what He spoke of for him.”

Or Haḥayyim

אֵת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר עָלָיו – What He spoke of for him: [Why does the text not refer to the fulfillment of promises to Avraham’s descendants?] In truth, God’s devotion to Avraham stems from who he was. God’s relationship with Israel is derived from His relationship with Avraham. Thus, God desired to bestow upon Avraham that which He had promised to give him, namely to benefit him and his descendants forever after. Avraham will be sure to guide his progeny along the proper path, because if future generations refuse to follow God’s ways, God will be reluctant to realize the promises that He has made to His beloved Avraham, that is, to favor the Israelite people.

Shadal

[“what is right”] others [“what is… just”] Often, a person will treat one person

Malbim

כִּי יְְדַעְְְתִּיו – For I have chosen him: God states: I have known and chosen Avraham, and that connection has provided him a level of personal providence. In turn, Avraham has been made into a conduit through which blessings will flow to all the nations of the earth. Had Avraham never lived, God’s association with Earth would have lapsed. The world would have deteriorated to the point that it would be governed only by the constellations and laws of nature. But Avraham did exist, and God’s providence attached to him, which developed into a larger relationship with the rest of humanity.

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman

וְְשָׁמְְרוּ דֶּרֶךְְְ יהוה – To keep the way of the Lord: This phrase refers to the manner in which God Himself acts toward the world.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

כִּי יְְדַעְְְתִּיו – For I have chosen him: God acknowledged that Avraham will instruct his descendants to walk in God’s ways. Now, God’s foreknowledge of a fact does not contradict humans’ free will to choose their own path, as Rambam explained. God therefore uses the term *yedaativ* [literally: “I know of him”] to describe the future, because God’s knowledge of Avraham’s future behavior is no more than knowledge. It does not compel Avraham to teach his children to follow God. Rather, Avraham will willingly and voluntarily choose to train his descendants in that way. This also explains why God did not inform Avraham of what He knows, so as not to force a specific choice on him.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

יְְצַוֶּה אֶת־בָּנָיו וְְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו – That he may direct his children and his household: Every member of the covenantal community must leave two wills: a material will in which he disposes of his personal wealth and belongings, and a spiritual will, in which he passes on the mandate to adhere to the *derekh Hashem* [“God’s way"]. God declared: Avraham will entrust the spiritual treasure to his children, and is therefore worthy of the covenant. According to Rambam, the word *mitzva* means not merely a commandment, but is synonymous with the word *tzavaa* (“a will”). If the spiritual will had not been carried out, the covenant would have terminated. Avraham was the first teacher, not just to a few, but to tens of thousands, as Rambam writes. The community organized around Avraham consisted of students. The main aspect of the community was the teacher–pupil relationship, rather than the biological father–son relationship. Avraham’s responsibility was to see to it that there was someone to pass on the *tzavaa* to create a community of teachers and students; a community of *mesora* [“tradition”], of transmission. Avraham gave Yitzḥak the responsibility for this teaching; Yitzḥak then passed it on to Yaakov.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

יְְצַוֶּה אֶת־בָּנָיו וְְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו – That he may direct his children and his household: God’s affection for Avraham stemmed primarily from the fact that he educated both his family and his followers in the ways of monotheism and Godly morality. The fact that he taught and inspired others was more precious to God than all of Avraham’s personal spiritual accomplishments or the tests he overcame.

Verse 20

וַיֹּאמֶר יהוה זַעֲקַת סְְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה כִּי־רָבָּה וְְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְְדָה מְְאֹד׃

Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sedom and Amora is great, and their sin is very grave.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

זַעֲקַת סְְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה כִּי־רָבָּה – The outcry against Sedom and Amora is great: The “great” transgression of the people of Sedom and Amora was their terrible social crimes against others. These violations occurred on all levels of severity. In contrast, according to Rabbi Ḥanina in *Bereishit Rabbah* (49:9), the word “great” means that the sins grew increasingly worse. From that perspective, the rest of humanity had already condemned Sedom and Amora. However, people tend to get less upset about others’ excessive sexual or sensual activity. People do not hold their governments responsible for failing to limit or govern such behavior, believing that the state can continue to function well even with wanton licentiousness. At worst, debauchery is considered an offense against God. It can be tolerated as long as society looks the other way. Hence, the lewdness and lack of sexual boundaries did not elicit an outcry against Sedom and Amora from the rest of the world. However, God considered the indulgences and absence of restraint to be a very grave sin, bad enough to threaten their continued existence. Nature itself reacts convulsively in such circumstances and cannot abide the abominations like those that occurred in these cities. Thus the Torah later warns Israel: Let the land not vomit you out for making it impure, as it vomited out the nation there before you (Leviticus 18:28).

Neḥama Leibowitz

וְְחַטָּאתָם כִּי כָבְְדָה מְְאֹד – Their sin is very grave: The height of their wickedness lay not in the activities of individual transgressors, but in the fact that such iniquitous behavior was clothed in legality, in the fact that it was a social norm.

Verse

Or Haḥayyim

אֵרֲדָה־נָּא וְְאֶרְְְאֶה – I shall go down and see: What did God mean by admitting that He must go down to see what was happening in Sedom? Why would God need a closer look? Furthermore, the statement: I shall see if they have really done as much as the outcry that has reached Me, suggests that God has some uncertainty about what was transpiring. How can that be right? According to Rashi, the verse is not teaching that God is ignorant. Instead, it teaches that human courts must thoroughly examine a case before reaching a ruling, just as God did here. I find that interpretation problematic. Why does a similar verse regarding the construction of the Tower of Babel not suffice for that lesson? [In 11:5 the Torah states: But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower being built by the children of men.] Indeed, Rashi makes the same point there. I would like to argue that our verse describes the method by which God exercises compassion and righteousness in dealing with His creatures. According to the strict application of halakhic law in human courts, people who break the rules are punished based on the respected statuses of the perpetrator and the victim. The court assesses a payment for *boshet*, the shame of the victim. That payment considers the social standing of both the person who has caused the shame and the individual who has been shamed. By analogy, should a Jew violate any one of God’s commandments, rebelling against God, the object of the betrayal is so exalted that the offender should rightfully be destroyed from the world along with everything around. Most people might imagine that the God judges His world with a strict rod of justice. Though that might seem harsh, it is proper and fair to react to disloyalty against God strictly. Moreover, were God to treat treacherous sinners leniently, that would imply equity between God and the person. Under such a system, perhaps the generation of the flood would not have been condemned to death. God here explains something about His system of justice. He Himself will come down to judge the people of Sedom. God agreed to descend from His illustrious position, and He was prepared to judge the towns by ignoring His own status, which had been impugned through their actions. Regarding Sedom, the question was: In what manner will God judge and be judged in the city? The cries emerging from Sedom want Him to respond from His elevated role as creator, in which case the people of Sedom would have to be destroyed. God proclaimed that He will evaluate the situation after he has descended from his lofty honor and has judged the people as if they were His equals. The verdict was still a guilty one, and therefore Sedom would be obliterated.

Malbim

אֵרֲדָה־נָּא וְְאֶרְְְאֶה – I shall go down and see: God’s justice considers both the righteous and the wicked. God examines people’s evil attributes, but He also accounts for the context of the transgressions and the motives of the wrongdoers. When Sedom was judged, it was important to determine why they had caused all travelers to disappear from their land. Why did they constantly harass travelers and threaten their lives? Based on these questions, the people of Sedom surely deserved to be wiped out. However, before passing His judgment, God descended from heaven to examine the people’s characters and the reasons for their coarseness. Perhaps they were so impoverished that they were unable to share their meager possessions. Alternately, maybe they were so overwhelmed by an abundance of destitute travelers that they could not meet the demands on their resources. If there were famine, it would be more difficult to share their food stores. If there was a threat of war, the city of Sedom would have banned strangers from entering to prevent spying. Any of these explanations for Sedom’s lack of hospitality would have mitigated the punishment.

Verse 22

וַיִּפְְְנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְְכוּ סְְדֹמָה וְְאַבְְְרָהָם עוֹדֶנּוּ עֹמֵד לִפְְְנֵי יהוה׃

The men turned from there and went toward Sedom, while Avraham still stood before the Lord.

Haketav Vehakabbala

וְְאַבְְְרָהָם עוֹדֶנּוּ עֹמֵד לִפְְְנֵי יהוה – While Avraham still stood before the Lord: Should the text not have read: while the Lord still stood before Avraham? [God, after all, had come to speak with Avraham, not the other way around.] Our verse involves a scribal emendation. This does not mean, God forbid, that a copyist has changed the language of our holy Torah. Nobody would ever falsify the words of Scripture and boast to amending the text! The Sages use this term to mean that from the context of the passage, the language should be different. When the text says something unexpected, it appears as if a scribe has corrected the text in order to grant more respect to God.

Verse 24

אוּלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְְּתוֹךְְְ הָעִיר הַאַף תִּסְְְפֶּה וְְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לַמָּקוֹם לְְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם אֲשֶׁר בְְּקִרְְְבָּהּ׃

What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Would You really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?

Malbim

אוּלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְְּתוֹךְְְ הָעִיר – What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? By saying “in the city,” Avraham meant to suggest that even fifty partially righteous people, considered good by the standards of the city, should be enough to save the city. Most of Sedom’s population was deeply sinful, so even a mediocre person would be seen as virtuous by contrast. The angel of death, upon being released in the city, would not identify these comparatively upright people, do to their many flaws. Avraham therefore challenged God: Will You destroy the city despite a few partially righteous people who might live there?

Haamek Davar

וְְלֹא־תִשָּׂא לַמָּקוֹם – Would You not spare the place: Avraham asked to save “the place,” and not “the whole place.” When God responded to Avraham, He said: If I find fifty righteous people… I will spare the whole place for their sake (18:26). Avraham was unaware that it was possible to save the entire city on behalf of a small group of righteous people. Avraham’s request to save “the place” could refer either to the entire city of Sedom [which is how God treated the petition], or it might refer only to the specific neighborhood, street, or homes where the righteous people themselves live. If those areas alone were to be saved, God would not be killing the righteous with the wicked. But God introduced Avraham to the concept that the presence of good people can protect the whole city. This ambiguity in Avraham’s language teaches us how to express ourselves in prayer at times of trouble. [We should phrase our requests of God in a way such that it can be understood in maximal or minimal terms, and hope that God grants the maximal request.]

Genesis 18:25

חָלִלָה לְְּךָ מֵעֲשֹׂת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְְהָמִית צַדִּיק עִם־רָשָׁע וְְהָיָה כַצַּדִּיק כָּרָשָׁע חָלִלָה לָּךְְְ הֲשֹׁפֵט כָָּל־הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְְְׁפָּט׃

Far be it from You to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous like the wicked. Far be it from You! Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?”

The words: FAvraham’s :Avraham’s is not related to the claim: Fdid Avraham’s is God would Avraham’s prayers strict

Tz

,In truth, Avraham city’s some did only people would the truth of :T, not sometimes be :id:He meant . Wan entire population edSimilarlywarned :Since strict d

Malbim

חָלִלָה לְְּךָ – Far be it from You: Avraham said to God: You judge the world, and You must judge wicked acts within their contexts. A person who is considered righteous in a wicked place might be considered evil in the context of a righteous place. It is wrong to kill people who are virtuous along with those who are cruel – meaning, that it is wrong to destroy somebody who is only considered virtuous when in the company of those who are cruel. That punishment is unjust even though those relatively righteous people would, in other venues and compared to other people, not be labeled good. Because You are judge of the world, You must look at the larger context, in which those people are considered exemplary by friends and neighbors. How can You kill those people along with others who are far beneath them, given that they are saints saint compared to them?

Haamek Davar

חָלִלָה לְְּךָ – Far be it from You: Avraham made two arguments. First, if the righteous are destroyed along with the wicked, then no lesson will be taught regarding reward and punishment [since no righteous people will remain to learn the lesson. The destruction will merely desecrate God’s name]. Second, even ignoring the desecration of God’s name, it would be untenable for the Judge of all the earth not to do justice.

Neḥama Leibowitz

חָלִלָה לְְּךָ – Far be it from You: A principle that emerges from the dialogue between Avraham and God is the responsibility of the righteous few towards the rest of the society, however corrupt, and their capacity to save it from destruction by the sheer force of their own merit and moral impact.

Verse 26

וַיֹּאמֶר יהוה אִם־אֶמְְְצָא בִסְְְדֹם חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם בְְּתוֹךְְְ הָעִיר וְְנָשָׂאתִי לְְכָָל־הַמָּקוֹם בַּעֲבוּרָם׃

The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sedom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

Shadal

אִם־אֶמְְְצָא בִסְְְדֹם חֲמִשִּׁים צַדִּיקִם – If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sedom: Avraham begged God to forgive the entire population should there be found fifty righteous people, or forty, or thirty, or twenty, or just ten. Even ten worthy people would be a community with enough power to persuade others to reform. If that minority could convince the others to put aside their abominations, perhaps they could succeed in nullifying the decree of destruction. However, it was unlikely that fewer than ten good people could muster the ability or the fortitude to rehabilitate the entire city.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַיֹּאמֶר יהוה – The Lord said: God acknowledged the possibility that there were fifty righteous people in Sedom. But those people would have to be capable of publicly living their wholesome lives without shame and without fear that they would be attacked due to their commitment to virtue and honesty. These heroic people would have to hold the power to influence their community towards holiness, perfection, justice, and equity. God said that if that is the case, He would extend compassion even to the sinners. He would not only spare the town for the sake of the fifty worthy people, but for the benefit of the wicked, since mercy would allow the good men and women to influence the whole city. It would be commendable that the otherwise cruel population had tolerated their anomalous righteous neighbors. That fact alone would prove that the citizens of Sedom had not sinned so egregiously that they would be irredeemable. When the cruel majority tolerates the virtuous minority, even if the majority constantly mocks the few noble people, the majority should not be viewed as wholly criminal or evil. However, should the townsfolk treat the very concept of uprightness as criminal, outlawing ethics itself and punishing those who act morally, then that community had become wicked beyond hope. That is what God meant when He declared: The guilt of the Amorites is not yet resolved (15:16). The Canaanites allowed Avraham to live among them and to build altars to the God of truth and kindness. Similarly, in the current narrative, God would not pass a guilty verdict against Sedom until it was clear that they had fallen to the level of total wickedness and corruption.

Haamek Davar

וְְנָשָׂאתִי לְְכָָל־הַמָּקוֹם בַּעֲבוּרָם – I will spare the whole place for their sake: God said to Avraham: [If there are fifty righteous people,] I will not kill just the wicked while the righteous survive. Instead, I will allow the merit of the righteous to protect even the evil ones from doom.

Verse 27

וַיַּעַן אַבְְְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאַלְְְתִּי לְְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי וְְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר׃

Then Avraham spoke up again and said, “Now that I have dared to speak to the Lord, though I am mere dust and ashes,

Malbim

וַיַּעַן אַבְְְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר – Then Avraham spoke up again and said: Avraham began to negotiate with God, and he introduced the arbitrary number of fifty. It then occurred to him that perhaps even a smaller figure would suffice. That is what Avraham meant when he said: Now that I have dared to speak: I opened my mouth in petition to God, despite the fact that I am mere dust and ashes – and I cannot possibly know God’s mind. Perhaps I have overshot the mark, and I did not have to begin my request with a number as high as fifty. Now I will see if God will permit an even lower figure.

Haamek Davar

וַיַּעַן אַבְְְרָהָם וַיֹּאמַר – Then Avraham spoke up again and said: The verb *ayin–nun–heh* [literally: “respond”] connotes a loud proclamation. For example, in *Sota* 32b Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai taught: When people describe their own achievements they should speak softly, but when listing faults they should speak loudly. The prooftext for speaking softly about achievements comes from the Torah’s description of the confession of the tithes. [In Deuteronomy 26:13, the verse uses the softer root *alef–mem–resh* regarding the statement: I have removed the consecrated portion from my house… I have not transgressed.] The prooftext for speaking loudly about faults comes from the Torah’s description of the declaration when bringing first fruits. In that verse, adds the root *ayin–nun–heh* when referring to the admission that: My ancestor was a wandering Aramean.] In this context, the verse uses both *vayaan* and *vayomer*. Avraham made his request modestly and quietly, as is appropriate when praying to God. However, Avraham’s sense of compassion and pity got the better of him, and he raised his voice in desperation, offering God words of appeasement and respect, even though he realized that it is improper to speak so brazenly to God.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

וְְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר – Though I am mere dust and ashes: In Tractate Ḥullin 88b, Rava taught: Because Avraham characterized himself as nothing more than dust and ashes, his descendants were rewarded with two corresponding commandments: the ashes of the red heifer [which are used to purify someone who has touched a human corpse], and the dust of the *sota* [employed in the trial of the suspected adulterous wife]. These dust and ashes are not subject to impurity. Vegetation and water are also not subject to impurity, unless they are removed from the ground or if a person has performed some act on them [to turn them into vessels]. Impurity is not inherent in any creation, and nothing is fated to become impure. Rather, people’s poor choices result in impurity. Thus, we find that the Torah links all of the worst sins to impurity and defilement, as we read: Do not defile the land in which you live (Numbers 35:34). Similarly: Do not make yourselves detestable by contact with any of these swarming creatures. Do not defile yourselves with them or be defiled by them (Leviticus 11:43).

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

וְְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר – I am mere dust and ashes: This expression used by Avraham seems to conflict with the concept of human dignity, the idea so well epitomized by Avraham as he fulfilled the mitzva of *hakhnasat orḥim* [welcoming guests]. In fact, the opposing motifs of man’s lowliness and man’s greatness are both true. Here, in his prayer to God on behalf of Sedom, Avraham used the expression: I am mere dust and ashes, because the approach to God during prayer should reflect man’s utter helplessness. Complete self–deprecation is the most important element in the prayer experience.

Verse 28

אוּלַי יַחְְְסְְרוּן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם חֲמִשָּׁה הֲתַשְְְׁחִית בַּחֲמִשָּׁה אֶת־כָָּל־הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְְְׁחִית אִם־אֶמְְְצָא שָׁם אַרְְְבָּעִים וַחֲמִשָּׁה׃

what if the righteous are five less than fifty? Will You destroy the whole city for the lack of five people?” He said, “If I find forty–five there, I will not destroy it.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

לֹא אַשְְְׁחִית – I will not destroy it: Avraham’s incremental deduction in his requests of God raises difficulties. I will attempt to explain it based on the changes in God’s responses. God begins by saying: I will not destroy it (18:28), and then says: I will refrain (18:29 and 30), and ends with: I will not destroy (18:31 and 32). In my opinion, God’s willingness to spare the cities of Sedom and Amora rests not on the character of fifty righteous people, which is Avraham’s approach, but on the presence of a minority within the generally wicked population. According to Avraham’s plan, as the number of worthy people lowers, so are the chances that their merit could spare the cities. In contrast, God’s considerations are not dependent on any exact number of worthy people. God is only interested in whether the evil citizens of Sedom, who have forgotten the very existence of God, were prepared to tolerate any number of righteous men and women among them. If there is a large group of righteous people, then we could understand that the sinful natives are too afraid of their neighbors to root out the righteous. If the righteous people are a tiny minority, they are perhaps left alone because they are ignored and overlooked. Only if the righteous population is of a medium size can we give credit to the rest of the population for tolerating the righteous. This would be true if the righteous group is not big enough to intimidate the sinners, but not so small that they are not even noticed. Avraham might have been seeking some clarification on this issue. God responded in kind. When God said: I will not destroy it, He meant, I will not obliterate the towns but will find some other mechanism for improving the situation. When God later promised: I will refrain [e’ese, literally: “I will not do”], He means, I will not act at all against the city, because Sedom has enough of a moral foundation that even within the largely corrupt society, the minority could influence the city to repent and reform. If the city contains forty–five, twenty, or ten righteous individuals, God pledged not to destroy the city. And if there are forty or thirty pious people there, He would refrain from any interference at all. Alternatively, perhaps the passage should be understood in an opposite manner. God stated: If there are forty or thirty righteous people in Sedom, I will refrain from unleashing a total punishment against them, but I will not completely forgive the people either. Because there are forty or thirty righteous people, their merit will lessen the punishment for the whole community. According to this understanding, the statement: I will refrain promises less than the declaration of I will not destroy it. According to this, there is more merit with the extreme number [such as forty–five, twenty, and ten] and less with the middle numbers [such as forty and thirty]. Based on both interpretations, God extended His kindness to Avraham, and Avraham was shown a glimpse of the mechanisms of divine providence. Avraham’s descendants can learn from this dialogue the necessity and importance of a righteous minority within a larger majority. Israel has been fated to live for thousands of years as the smallest among the family of nations. Even within our people, the truly righteous and religious are sometimes only a small minority.

Malbim

אוּלַי יַחְְְסְְרוּן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצַּדִּיקִם חֲמִשָּׁה – What if the righteous are five less than fifty: Avraham argued as follows: Perhaps among the fifty good people, there will be five who are better than the majority of the citizens of Sedom, but who are still relatively wicked compared to the more righteous forty–five. Avraham feared that God might not include these five within the forty–five truly good people, in which case the total of fifty would not be reached. Hence, Avraham asked whether the lower quality of five out of the fifty would mean the destruction of the whole. God assured Avraham that He would not require the five last righteous individuals at all. Even the presence of forty–five virtuous people would spare the city.

Verse 29

וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד לְְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמַר אוּלַי יִמָּצְְאוּן שָׁם אַרְְְבָּעִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בַּעֲבוּר הָאַרְְְבָּעִים׃

He spoke to Him yet again, saying, “What if only forty are found there?” He said, “I will refrain for the sake of the forty.”

Or Haḥayyim

וַיֹּסֶף עוֹד לְְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו – He spoke to Him yet again: Avraham continued to petition God in the same manner that he had when he asked about the possibility of forty–five righteous men. The number forty–five was calculated based on the idea that God himself would represent the tenth virtuous person if each of the five cities had only nine worthy people. Now Avraham employed similar logic. Would God agree to substitute Himself for the missing righteous in case only four out of the five cities had ten good people? Would God count Himself as the fifth set of ten? This explains the term *eilav* [“with Him”], for the defense of the cities would require God’s participation too.

Tz

–the text omits those words and Avraham’s

Verse

Malbim

אוּלַי יִמָּצְְאוּן שָׁם שְְׁלֹשִׁים – What if only thirty are found there: Avraham said to God: You have acknowledged that if four of the cities have ten righteous people, then that majority of cities could protect the minority that don’t have any righteous people at all. Hence, it should not matter if that majority comprises four cities [out of the five] or three, since three would still be a majority of the cities with a righteous group. Thus, even though I have inferred from You, God, that the presence of thirty virtuous individuals [that is, ten such people in each of three places] would be sufficient, I wish to confirm this point. Please: may the Lord not be angry with my request to clarify the matter: What if only thirty are found there? In response to this question, God assured Avraham that he correctly understood God’s calculations: If there would be thirty worthy people, God would refrain from punishing the cities, and even the two cities that are wholly wicked would be saved.

Verse 31

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה־נָא הוֹאַלְְְתִּי לְְדַבֵּר אֶל־אֲדֹנָי אוּלַי יִמָּצְְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְְְׂרִים וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אַשְְְׁחִית בַּעֲבוּר הָעֶשְְְׂרִים׃

“Now that I have dared to speak to the Lord,” he said, “what if only twenty are found there?” He said, “I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty.”

Malbim

אוּלַי יִמָּצְְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְְְׂרִים – What if only twenty are found there? Avraham attempted a different approach, since if only two towns were each able to muster ten righteous individuals, that would not constitute a majority of the five towns, and two worthy cities could not save the three wholly wicked places. Therefore, Avraham raised the following two alternatives: If two cities contain ten good people each, would that suffice to save only those cities, since each one would contain a congregation of ten worthy people? Or would twenty righteous people mean that the majority of cities [that is, three out of the five that do not contain any righteous people] are wicked, and all the cities would be swept away because of the overall sinfulness of the whole area? Avraham opened this section with the words: Now that I have dared to speak to the Lord, because he was introducing a new line of argument. Avraham had initially hoped that ten righteous people in each of the majority of cities could save the minority. But that would imply that a wicked majority would overcome a righteous minority. Still, Avraham asked God: If that is the case, please pretend that we have not had the previous conversation at all, and that our dialogue is beginning anew now. Hence, What if only twenty are found there – will those two places be spared? To this God responded: I will not destroy, for the sake of the twenty. Note that God did not responds: I will refrain [as He does in verses 29 and 30]. That is because He was declaring that He would in fact punish the remaining three cities which contain no righteous people whatsoever. However, in that circumstance, God promised not to obliterate the entire plain including the two cities with righteous people. Instead, God promised to act justly and kill the people of only the three sinful cities, while the plain as a whole, containing the two other cites, would remain intact.

Verse

Or Haḥayyim

וַיֹּאמֶר אַל־נָא יִחַר לַאדֹנָי – Then he said, “Please: may the Lord not be angry”: With this request, Avraham hoped that his own merit would protect two of the wholly wicked cities, while God’s righteousness would spare two of the other five towns. The last city, which would hold ten virtuous people, would have the merit to save itself. This is why Avraham asked God not to get angry. Avraham was praying that his own goodness be included in the equation. That might provoke God, since Avraham was implicitly equating his own merit to that of God. Therefore, Avraham opened by saying: But let me speak just once more, instead of saying: let me speak to God. This indicates that he was referring to himself.

Verse

וַיֵּלֶךְְְ – When… He left: God exited immediately after responding to the question about ten righteous individuals. God did not give Avraham an opportunity to request a lower number, because Avraham had already indicated that he would not continue to press God on the matter when he said: Let me speak just once more. Alternately, God did not wait for Avraham to lower the number because He knew that a minimum of ten worthy men were required to protect the cities from obliteration. This contrasts with Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai, who claims that the entire world can endure if there is but one virtuous individual on earth. Perhaps that is only true for a completely good person, and there was no such person in the plain. Perhaps had Avraham – who was totally exemplary – himself lived in Sedom, his merit could have changed the story’s outcome.

Haamek Davar

וְְאַבְְְרָהָם שָׁב לִמְְְקֹמוֹ – And Avraham went back to his place: Avraham returned to himself, that is to his usual state of consciousness. He no longer needed to meditate and pray. Though it is possible to petition God in the absence of divine revelation, nevertheless Avraham separated from the divine influence and returned to his normal state. This text reveals Avraham’s righteousness. Recall that in chapter 14, Avraham risked his life to save his nephew Lot during the war of the four kings against the five kings. Once Avraham understood that God did not want him to pray further on Lot’s behalf, Avraham held his tongue.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

וְְאַבְְְרָהָם שָׁב לִמְְְקֹמוֹ – And Avraham went back to his place: When God had finished speaking with Avraham, He left. This verse alludes to the teaching of the Sages, who explain that hospitality takes precedence over receiving the divine presence. Avraham had been occupied with the commandment of hospitality, for which he had walked away from God. But after Avraham’s dialogue with God, he returned to the higher level of spirituality that he had held before. [Since welcoming guests is greater than communing with God, Avraham descended when he debated the fate of Sedom with the Almighty. He then climbed back up to his previous state of spirituality.] If we do not rank these two experiences as we have, Avraham was merely moving from one encounter to the other without any change in status. Why then would the text now claim that he had gone back?

Chapter 19, verse 1

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְְׁנֵי הַמַּלְְְאָכִים סְְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב וְְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְְּשַׁעַר־סְְדֹם וַיַּרְְְא־לוֹט וַיָּקָָם לִקְְְרָאתָם וַיִּשְְְׁתַּחוּ אַפַּיִם אָרְְְצָה׃

The two angels arrived at Sedom in the evening, while Lot was sitting in the city gate. Lot saw them, and rose to greet them, bowing with his face to the ground.

Or Haḥayyim

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְְׁנֵי הַמַּלְְְאָכִים סְְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב – The two angels arrived at Sedom in the evening: Why did the angels arrive in Sedom in the evening? The angels were looking for a pretext to save Lot, which they did by giving him the opportunity to offer them a place to sleep. As a reward for that hospitality, Lot and his family could then be saved. According to the Sages, Lot was only saved due to Avraham’s merit. Still, it would have been inappropriate for Lot to be saved only due to his uncle’s credit. Lot therefore had to do his own good deed, no matter how minor it might be. Furthermore, had the angels arrived in the city in the middle of the day [when the rest of the population could have seen them], it is unlikely that the people of Sedom would have allowed them to enter Lot’s house at all.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וְְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְְּשַׁעַר־סְְדֹם – While Lot was sitting in the city gate: The Sages explain that the verb *yoshev* is written defectively [that is, without the letter *vav* after the *yod*] to indicate that Lot had been appointed as a judge in Sedom on that very day. [The shortened word corresponds to the brief time Lot had held his job.] This was an unusual turn of events! The city was notoriously unwelcoming to outsiders, and yet they elevated this foreigner to a position of power over them. With his new authority, Lot was required to adjudicate a case that challenged the very first statute in the Sedom code of law, namely criminalizing any gesture of hospitality. Lot was no fool, and he had certainly withheld criticism of this law up until then, which allowed him to rise in power. Lot, then, is an example of the way that Avraham had characterized a righteous person in that society: namely, someone who dared to serve as a positive role model for the citizens, somebody who was not afraid to publicly defy the warped norms of his neighbors.

Malbim

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְְׁנֵי הַמַּלְְְאָכִים סְְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב – The two angels arrived at Sedom in the evening: In my commentary to Judges I detailed the differences between the culture of Giv’a and the culture of Sedom. [Chapter 19 in the Book of Judges contains a story of abuse similar to the one related here.] The citizens of Giv’a had not codified a prohibition of hospitality, and they had not banned all visitors from their town. They refused to offer shelter to the protagonist because the population was generally selfish and unkind. They demanded that the guest be turned over to them because they were overcome with lust. In contrast, the town of Sedom had passed a law making it illegal to take in guests. Cruelty became normal practice in that town. Naturally, such an unethical approach to interpersonal relations influenced the mindset of the residents. Children born into that society were raised to believe that it was good and righteous to reject the other, and that it was unlawful to embrace the stranger. That attitude could never be uprooted from the philosophy of life of the people of Sedom. When God sent his messengers to Sedom to investigate the root of their wickedness, the angels arrived in the evening. Had they appeared in the daytime, the locals could have accused them of violating the law against non–residents staying overnight. Anybody who entered the city at night could argue that their intention had been merely to pass through on the way somewhere which did welcome visitors, but that the night forced them to stop. They could claim that they should not be held accountable for violating the city’s rules, since they had remained there inadvertently. Furthermore, since Lot had been appointed a judge over the community – which we know because he was sitting in the city gate, where judges preside – he would not have been accused by the natives of disregarding the law, for he was the one responsible for upholding and applying the law. Finally, note that the angels refrained from approaching Lot directly to avoid giving the impression that they were seeking lodging. Lot saw them from a distance and then got up to greet the travelers.

Harḥeiv Davar

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְְׁנֵי הַמַּלְְְאָכִים סְְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב – The two angels arrived at Sedom in the evening: Why does the Torah relate this incident at all? The story aims to illustrate the wickedness perpetrated by the men of Sedom against the angels, even as Lot was trying to be hospitable. Notice that before the angels had arrived in the city, God had declared: I shall go down now and see if they have really done as much as the outcry that has reached Me (18:21). In truth, Lot deserved to be saved even had he not extended kindness to these outsiders. Therefore, we could ask why God arranged for this entire episode to unfold the way it did, [since God knew how evil the town was, and Lot did not need to demonstrate his righteousness.] Moreover, God does not punish if it is not to right time to apply the attribute of justice. Hence, God arranged circumstances so that the townspeople would have an opportunity to commit an egregious and blatant transgression so that they could be judged.

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman

וְְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְְּשַׁעַר־סְְדֹם – While Lot was sitting in the city gate: Note the differences between the hospitality extended by Avraham and the kindness displayed by Lot. Though Lot appeared honorable and generous compared to the other residents of Sedom, Lot’s actions were not the same as Avraham’s. While Lot rose to greet the travelers, Avraham ran to welcome them. Avraham demonstrated his eagerness to perform an act of kindness.

Verse 2

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֶּה נָּא־אֲדֹנַי סוּרוּ נָא אֶל־בֵּית עַבְְְדְְּכֶם וְְלִינוּ וְְרַחֲצוּ רַגְְְלֵיכֶם וְְהִשְְְׁכַּמְְְתֶּם וַהֲלַכְְְתֶּם לְְדַרְְְכְְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְְרוּ לֹּא כִּי בָרְְחוֹב נָלִין׃

He said, “Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant’s house, stay the night, wash your feet, and then go on your way early in the morning.” “No,” they said, “we will spend the night in the square.”

Haamek Davar

וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֶּה נָּא־אֲדֹנַי – He said, “Please my lords”: The *dagesh* [“diacritical dot”] that appears in the letter *nun* of the third word in the verse, *na* [translated as “please,” but Netziv prefers the translation “now”] teaches that Lot was initially reluctant to invite the travelers into his home, either due to opposition to hospitality by the local population or because Lot felt that he was inadequate to honor such respectable guests. However, Lot watched the men arrive in the evening, and he knew that there was nowhere for them to sleep, since Sedom had no inn of any kind. When Lot realized that the two visitors would have to sleep in the streets like other people who passed through the town, he was unable to contain his hospitality and he addressed the visitors. He implored them: I ask you *now* in this late hour of the evening, when you have no other option, to turn aside from your high status and agree to enter my house.

Verse

Shadal

וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְְְׁתֶּה – He made a feast for them: The term *mishte* is not synonymous with the word *seuda*. A *seuda* is a large feast eaten in the afternoon, which would then be followed by a light meal in the evening. A *mishte* is primarily about the consumption of wine. A *seuda* is also referred to as *leḥem* [“bread”], as in the verse: And they sat down and ate their meal [leḥem] (37:25).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְְְׁתֶּה – He made a feast for them: Lot himself prepared the feast for his guests and baked unleavened bread for them. Lot’s lone and single–handed hospitality differs from the joy, commotion, and group participation in Avraham’s earlier hospitality. When three guests came into Avraham’s home, he encouraged the entire household to unite in offering a grand reception to them. In contrast, neither Lot’s wife nor his children joined him in fulfilling the commandment of welcoming visitors. Lot stood alone in his house, isolated with the spirit of Avraham.

Verse

Or Haḥayyim

טֶרֶם יִשְְְׁכָּבוּ – They had not yet gone to bed: Why did the angels not destroy Sedom as soon as they arrived in the town? The angels waited for morning to fulfill their mission since compassion is dispensed more readily during the daytime, making the daytime a better time to rescue Lot from the disaster. In contrast, the darkness of night is when the attribute of justice is at its fiercest, so it would have been more difficult for Lot to escape from the destruction.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וְְאַנְְְשֵׁי הָעִיר אַנְְְשֵׁי סְְדֹם – All the townsmen, the men of Sedom: The text specifies the identity of the men were who surrounded Lot’s house. These people were not the common rabble, but the townsmen, the men of Sedom. The prominent citizens protested Lot’s impertinent violation of the local cruel norms.

Haamek Davar

כָָּל־הָעָם מִקָּצֶה – All the people from every quarter: People who lived far from Lot gathered around his house. Surrounding the home was an innocent activity in their eyes, so nobody was reluctant to join the growing mob. All citizens, including the old men who felt no lust for the visitors, demanded to see Sedom’s abnormal form of justice be served.

Verse 5

וַיִּקְְְרְְאוּ אֶל־לוֹט וַיֹּאמְְרוּ לוֹ אַיֵּה הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ אֵלֶיךָ הַלָּיְְְלָה הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְְנֵדְְעָה אֹתָם׃

They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we may know them.”

Malbim

וַיִּקְְְרְְאוּ אֶל־לוֹט – They called to Lot: When the people of Sedom demanded that Lot bring his guests out to them, they did not have licentiousness in mind. They were only interested in humiliating the outsiders.

Haamek Davar

וַיִּקְְְרְְאוּ אֶל־לוֹט – They called to Lot: The people of Sedom exhibited a minimal level of etiquette by refusing to enter Lot’s house uninvited. Out of respect for their neighbor, the mob summoned Lot outside, where they made their demands while he stood at the door.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

הוֹצִיאֵם אֵלֵינוּ וְְנֵדְְעָה אֹתָם – Bring them out to us so that we may know them: The people said: We wish to know the visitors’ plans and desires. We must determine whether they have come here as spies. In response to this request, Lot stated: I have two daughters… But do not do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof (19:8). Lot claimed that the visitors were seeking his daughters’ hands in marriage, and by extension to be taken care of by their father.

Verse 6

וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט הַפֶּתְְְחָה וְְהַדֶּלֶת סָגַר אַחֲרָיו׃

Lot went out to speak to them, shutting the door behind him,

Haamek Davar

וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט – Lot went out to speak to them: Lot would not allow any of the mob into his home. Lot tried to shield his guests from the vile discussion about them.

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman

וַיֵּצֵא אֲלֵהֶם לוֹט – Lot went out to speak to them: Lot went outside in order to mollify the crowd.

Verse

Haamek Davar

כִּי־עַל־כֵּן בָּאוּ בְְּצֵל קֹרָתִי – For they have come under the protection of my roof: Lot said to the group: These visitors were important people. This is why Lot referred to his guests as *haanashim ha’el* [“these men,” understood to mean “the exalted men,”] meaning that they were particularly significant people. Lot argued: Normally I would not be hospitable to strangers, but I have invited these specific men into my home.

Verse 9

וַיֹּאמְְרוּ גֶּשׁ־הָלְְְאָה וַיֹּאמְְרוּ הָאֶחָד בָּא־לָגוּר וַיִּשְְְׁפֹּט שָׁפוֹט עַתָּה נָרַע לְְךָ מֵהֶם וַיִּפְְְצְְרוּ בָאִישׁ בְְּלוֹט מְְאֹד וַיִּגְְּשׁוּ לִשְְְׁבֹּר הַדָּלֶת׃

“Get out of our way,” they replied. “This fellow came here as a migrant and now he is setting himself up as a judge! We will treat you worse than them.” They pressed hard against Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

Malbim

וַיֹּאמְְרוּ גֶּשׁ־הָלְְְאָה – “Get out of our way,” they replied: The crazed crowd outside Lot’s house was not content with the offer of the man’s daughters, because they were not trying to satisfy their sexual desires. Rather, the mob was furious that Lot was disregarding their entrenched but corrupt rules and practices. Their motive for surrounding the house differed therefore from that of the men in Giv’a [See Judges 19]. Those people were appeased when they grabbed the visiting concubine, whom they proceeded to abuse. The people of Sedom declared: This fellow came here as a migrant and now he is setting himself up as a judge! If a foreigner settles in a new place and then violates the local laws, that person deserves a more serious punishment than a native who breaks local rules. Furthermore, they said to Lot, your case is particularly objectionable, for you gained permission to live in our city despite the fact that we loathe outsiders! You deserve nothing but the harshest punishment. Furthermore, since you have been appointed a judge in our midst, you owe even more loyalty to the laws you swore to uphold than does a local person? Therefore: We will treat you worse than them, because you have offended us both as a foreigner and as a judge! The people of Sedom no longer viewed Lot as an acceptable neighbor or as an authoritative judge. Instead, they saw him as an unwanted intruder. When the verse states that the people pressed hard against Lot, it means that they removed him from his position of power before removing him from the door to gain access to his house.

Verse

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman

וַיִּשְְְׁלְְחוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶת־יָדָם – But the men inside reached out: At this point, the angels had to intervene to rescue Lot from imminent danger. Still, the angels had to be careful in using a miracle to diffuse the situation, because they did not yet want to kill the residents of Sedom. God planned to destroy the mob that was attacking the house along with the rest of the city, which would soon be obliterated in a firestorm. The sudden and total annihilation of Sedom would serve as a severe warning for all generations. Still, Lot had to be rescued before the city could go up in flames. Hence, the visitors pulled Lot back into the house, away from the enraged crowd, and then struck the men outside with blindness to prevent them from locating the door.

Verse

Haamek Davar

מִקָּטֹן וְְעַד־גָּדוֹל – Young and old: Verse 4 refers to *minaar ve’ad zaken* [literally, “from youths to the elderly,”] while this verse refers to *mikaton ve’ad gadol* [literally, "from smallest to the biggest.”] Why? The first verse refers to the ages of the people of Sedom. It teaches that the mob which surrounded Lot’s house was not seeking sexual gratification – even the elderly [who were beyond such lust] believed that it was appropriate to drive out the visitors. This verse relates to the people’s social status. At first all those present – even the most important people – acted politely and did not attempt to break down the door. However, once Lot refused to cede to the crowd’s demands, they became determined to smash the door and storm the house against Lot’s will. Hence everybody was stricken with blindness.

Verse 12

וַיֹּאמְְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אֶל־לוֹט עֹד מִי־לְְךָ פֹה חָתָן וּבָנֶיךָ וּבְְְנֹתֶיךָ וְְכֹל אֲשֶׁר־לְְךָ בָּעִיר הוֹצֵא מִן־הַמָּקוֹם׃

The visitors said to Lot, “Who else do you have here – children–in–law, sons, daughters, or anyone else in the city? Bring them out of here,

Malbim

עֹד מִי־לְְךָ פֹה – Who else do you have here: In addition to the two daughters who would escape Sedom with their father, Lot had two married daughters who already had children of their own. The angels offered to save Lot’s sons–in–law and his grandchildren, who were Lot’s immediate family and were considered his actual sons and daughters. That is why the angels instructed Lot to order these relatives to flee.

Verse

Or Haḥayyim

כִּי־מַשְְְׁחִתִים אֲנַחְְְנוּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה – Because we are about to destroy this place: Why did the angels speak in the plural, given that only one of them was responsible for the destruction? The two angels spoke together in order to avoid the impression that the second one was merely an escort. Alternately, the angel Gavriel, who was about to unleash the destruction, came with his retinue. A third possibility is that Gavriel could not perform his mission before his partner Raphael had enabled Lot to escape, in which case Raphael was also partially responsible for the demolition of the city. [According to the Sages, an angel can only perform a single mission at a time.]

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

כִּי־גָדְְלָה צַעֲקָתָם אֶת־פְְּנֵי יהוה – So great is the outcry against them before the Lord: The ineffable four–letter name of God appears in this entire passage because that name signifies God’s compassionate dimension. Where there is no hope for reforming the corruption, total destruction is an expression of kindness and mercy.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

כִּי־מַשְְְׁחִתִים אֲנַחְְְנוּ אֶת־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה – Because we are about to destroy this place: The Sages explain that the angels sinned by uttering this statement [and claiming to take credit for God’s destruction of Sedom]. The Sages meant that when God threatens to punish a person or community, the decree can be repealed if the subject repents. In contrast, when an angel goes on a divine mission, the edict is set and cannot be changed. This is because awareness of a plan removes the possibility of free choice. Hence, God sent His agents to Sedom to speak on His behalf, hoping that when the people heard that God planned to destroy their city, they would repent from their wicked ways just as the citizens of Ninveh did [in the book of Jonah]. However, the angels who came to Sedom did not declare that God was considering obliterating the town. Rather, they said: We are about to destroy this place, thereby transforming the possibility into an inevitability. The angels robbed the people of Sedom of their chance to remove God’s threat. Lot understood from the expression, The Lord has sent us to destroy, that remorse was still possible, and that their mission was to encourage repentance. Hence, Lot immediately went out and spoke to his sons–in–law, hoping to inspire them to lead the rest of the city to abandon their wicked ways. He explained to his sons–in–law that the destruction was imminent without penitence, when he said: The Lord is about to destroy the city, which suggests that God had not yet finalized the verdict. Lot instructed his sons–in–law to leave the city, hoping that they would encourage the entire society to change its ways. This is comparable to Noaḥ building the ark. The construction itself served as a warning to all who watched him build.

Verse 14

וַיֵּצֵא לוֹט וַיְְְדַבֵּר אֶל־חֲתָנָיו לֹקְְחֵי בְְנֹתָיו וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְְּאוּ מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי־מַשְְְׁחִית יהוה אֶת־הָעִיר וַיְְְהִי כִמְְְצַחֵק בְְּעֵינֵי חֲתָנָיו׃

Lot went out and spoke to his sons–in–law, the men who were betrothed to his daughters, and told them, “Get up and leave this place: the Lord is about to destroy the city!” But his sons–in–law thought him laughable.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

חֲתָנָיו לֹקְְחֵי בְְנֹתָיו – His sons–in–law, the men who were betrothed to his daughters: Why does the verse define the term “sons–in–law” by adding: The men who were betrothed to [lokḥei, literally, “those who had taken”] his daughters”? Though these men had taken Lot’s daughters, they were not the man’s sons–in–law in the true sense of the term. They remained loyal citizens of Sedom, sharing the city’s practices and attitudes, and they never developed a bond with Avraham’s nephew. Lot had no authentic son–in–law in Sedom. Lot had not managed to instill in his daughters an appreciation for the values he had learned in Avraham’s household. Had he done so, they would never have married the cruel people that they did. Earlier verses [such as verse 3] allude to the fact that Lot tried to do what was right, and he was willing to risk his life on behalf of his community. But he remained an ineffective educator in his own home. This left Lot a lonely man among his children and relatives. Clearly, Avraham would never have been satisfied with men who “took his daughters” but who were unwilling or incapable of fully becoming his sons–in–law. Furthermore, we can assume that no daughter of Avraham would ever have married a man who refused to subscribe to her father’s philosophy and outlook on life. This story reveals a weakness that unfortunately recurs thousands of years later in a similar manner and under comparable circumstances. Lot knocked on the doors of his sons–in–law’s houses and mentioned the name of God, warning them: The Lord is about to destroy the city! All those fools could do was to laugh derisively at the old man for waking them up with a message that the end is nigh. Despite that, Lot truly believed that his sons–in–law would be more receptive to his message. He tried talking to them, and when that failed he gave up entirely without even trying to persuade his own sons. Tragically, the condition of our families today reflects a similar state of affairs.

Verse

Malbim

וַיָּאִיצוּ הַמַּלְְְאָכִים בְְּלוֹט – The angels hurried Lot: God had compassion for Lot and had him pushed out of the city, for he did not truly deserve this miraculous salvation.

Verse

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַיִּתְְְמַהְְְמָהּ – Still he hesitated: The term *vayitmahmah* [“he hesitated”] derives from the root *mem–heh–heh*, which is an expansion of the word *ma* [“what?”]. Lot hesitated because he could not decide whether to stay or to flee. It is no simple matter to abandon children and grandchildren who will be destroyed.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

שְְׁתֵּי בְְנֹתָיו – His two daughters: Why were the angels so concerned about Lot’s two daughters, telling Lot to take the women out of the city before its impending destruction? Lot’s daughters would become the ancestors of the Messiah. Ruth, a descendant of Moab, was the mother of the Davidic dynasty (Ruth 4:17). Naama the Ammonitess was the mother of Rehoboam (I Kings 14:21), and the Messiah will be a descendant of David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. God did not send the angels because He was interested in Lot or in his daughters. He was interested in something else: the Messiah. The great vision of a redeemed world would have been made impossible if Lot’s daughters had been destroyed in Sedom. This is also why the Torah relates the strange story of the act of incest that took place in the cave. Why else would the Torah record such an ugly event? It is not a story of incest. It is the story of the Messiah. The personality of the King Messiah is not mo­notonic. God weaves the personality of the Messiah with vast amounts of multicolored threads, like Joseph’s coat. The messianic soul is iridescent, multi–talented, rich in thought–filled volition, and it will be endowed with talents that seem contradictory. But everything good and fine and noble in man must be passed on to the Messiah. He will have the capacity for *gevura* [“heroism”]and *ḥesed* [“kindness”]. He will be a hero with unlimited power and strength who will defend justice. He will also be a man of unlimited loving–kindness, humble and simple. All these capabilities, capacities, and talents will merge in beautiful harmony in the King Messiah. Apparently, Lot’s daughters had something beautiful to contribute to the Messiah’s rich and powerful personality.

Verse 17

וַיְְְהִי כְְהוֹצִיאָם אֹתָם הַחוּצָה וַיֹּאמֶר הִמָּלֵט עַל־נַפְְְשֶׁךָ אַל־תַּבִּיט אַחֲרֶיךָ וְְאַל־תַּעֲמֹד בְְּכָָל־הַכִּכָּר הָהָרָה הִמָּלֵט פֶּן־תִּסָּפֶה׃

As soon as they had brought them out, one said, “Run for your life. Do not look back. Do not stop anywhere in the plain. Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away.”

Haamek Davar

וַיֹּאמֶר הִמָּלֵט עַל־נַפְְְשֶׁךָ – One said, “Run for your life”: The speaker here could not possibly have been the angel who was sent to rescue Lot, because how could he have subsequently argued: Flee there, because I cannot do anything until you reach it (19:22)? [That is, one angel was tasked with saving Lot while the other angel was busy destroying Sedom. They had different assignments.] Furthermore, if the angel’s mission was to help Lot escape from the city, then why was it not his job to transport Lot all the way to the hills, rather than expecting him to get there himself? The explanation is as follows: The angel who was dispatched to protect Lot was only instructed to remove him from the city and to separate the family from the town’s sinners. This was the same angel who had previously been sent to heal Avraham following his circumcision. [According to the Sages, both tasks were really one: protecting the lives of Avraham and Lot.] Now, someone who is free from sin is called “healed,” in that repentance is akin to recovery, as the verse states: Their hearts understand and they return – and are healed (Isaiah 6:10). Hence, once this angel saw Lot successfully to the city limits, he turned and left, leaving Lot to continue his escape by himself. Lot lacked sufficient merit to preserve his life during the destruction, which is why he had to flee. וְְאַל־תַּעֲמֹד בְְּכָָל־הַכִּכָּר – Do not stop anywhere in the plain: The destroying angel said to Lot: Do not hesitate due to concern for your cattle. This warning was meant for Lot’s wife and daughters too, but they were not worthy of hearing the angel speak directly to them. Hence, the angel addressed only Lot, and he conveyed the message to his family.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

אַל־תַּבִּיט אַחֲרֶיךָ – Do not look back: The many years that Lot wasted among the evil populace of Sedom could have been spent doing good deeds with Avraham. While fleeing Sedom’s evil and falsehood, while overcome with feelings of failure and frustration, he must not look back. Instead, he must forget his past and start anew. The angel, understanding Lot’s feelings of utter worthlessness, told him to save himself from the shame of that past by avoiding the retrospective glance.

Verse

Haketav Vehakabbala

אַל־נָא אֲדֹנָי – No, my lords, please: It seems to me that because Lot was in mortal danger, he did not have the presence of mind or clarity of thought to pray to God for salvation. Hence, he turned to God’s messengers instead and asked them to try harder to save him. Would they, he begged, appeal to God on his behalf and provide him with a place of refuge in a nearby city?

Malbim

אַל־נָא אֲדֹנָי – No, my lords, please: This was a direct petition to God, for the term *Adonai* here is in fact the name of God, rather than a generic term for “my lords.”

Verse 20

הִנֵּה־נָא הָעִיר הַזֹּאת קְְרֹבָה לָנוּס שָׁמָּה וְְהִוא מִצְְְעָר אִמָּלְְטָה נָא שָׁמָּה הֲלֹא מִצְְְעָר הִוא וּתְְְחִי נַפְְְשִׁי׃

There is a town here close enough for refuge. It is small. Let me flee there – is it not small? – so that I might survive.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וְְהִוא מִצְְְעָר – It is small: Lot several times mentioned that the nearby village is *mitzar*. This word is not an adjective meaning “small,” but a noun meaning “an insubstantial place.” The city of Tzoar had nothing of value to offer, no wealth or human comfort. Lot understood the warning, Do not look back, as a deliberate punishment. He was allowed to escape Sedom with nothing but his life. Lot conceded that the town of Tzoar provided no opportunity to flourish economically. Even if he were permitted to settle there, he would remain as poor as the moment he left Sedom.

Haamek Davar

הֲלֹא מִצְְְעָר הִוא וּתְְְחִי נַפְְְשִׁי – Is it not small? – so that I might survive: Lot’s request contains two parts. First, Lot argued that Tzoar was a small place, and as such its small population could not have been indulging their lusts in the same way as their neighbors in the big city. [There is generally less opportunity for crime in rural areas than in cities.] The Sages similarly interpret the verse: Come, my beloved, let us go to the fields; let us lodge in the villages [Song of Songs 7:12. The Talmud explains that the People of Israel said to God: Do not judge us like those who reside in cities where there is robbery, licentiousness, and vain or false oaths] Lot believed that Tzoar was a less wicked place than Sedom. Second, Lot begged: So that I might survive. He meant that without a reprieve for Tzoar, he would not be able to live. [That is, Lot was not hoping to live because the place is small. Rather, the fact that it is small is a reason for Tzoar not to be immediately destroyed.] There is a practical difference between the two arguments. According to the first approach, Tzoar should not be destroyed at all. According to the second approach, Tzoar should be destroyed later, after Lot would take temporary refuge there. Once he would leave, that town too could be destroyed.

Verse 22

מַהֵר הִמָּלֵט שָׁמָּה כִּי לֹא אוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת דָּבָר עַד־בֹּאֲךָ שָׁמָּה עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הָעִיר צוֹעַר׃

But hurry. Flee there, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” That is why the town is called Tzoar.

Tsaid Until you arrive there, prevent destroying destruction ,your presence will enable me destruction of the townreaches will not be able stop it destroying T,are עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הָעִיר צוֹעַר – That is why the town is called Tzoar: The original name of the place was Bela, as an earlier verse states: And the king of Bela – that is, Tzoar (14:2).

Haamek Davar

מַהֵר הִמָּלֵט שָׁמָּה – But hurry. Flee there: The fact that the angel urged Lot to flee to Tzoar proves that God planned to unleash the destruction as soon as the sun rose. Even though the angel was ordered to act at dawn, he was also instructed to wait until Lot was safely out of harm’s way. Had the punishment begun while Lot was still there, he would have been killed, since he did not deserve to be miraculously saved. Hence, the angel urged Lot to leave before the obliteration began. The angel instructed the family: Do not look back, not in order to prevent them from watching the catastrophe [which had in fact not begun yet], but so that their escape would not be slowed by their curiosity.

Verse

Malbim

וַיהוה הִמְְְטִיר – The Lord rained down: The destruction fell to the earth like rain descends from above to below. This demonstrates that God sent the punishment from heaven. It was not a natural event, but a providential one.

Verse 25

וַיַּהֲפֹךְְְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים הָאֵל וְְאֵת כָָּל־הַכִּכָּר וְְאֵת כָָּל־יֹשְְׁבֵי הֶעָרִים וְְצֶמַח הָאֲדָמָה׃

He overthrew those cities, and the whole plain, and all the cities’ inhabitants, and the vegetation on the land.

Haamek Davar

וְְאֵת כָָּל־יֹשְְׁבֵי הֶעָרִים – And all the cities’ inhabitants: The destruction of Sedom was not like an earthquake in which entire cities can sink into the ground while a few survivors escape the catastrophe by fleeing to the fields. Nobody in Sedom was left alive, because the entire area was pummeled with sulfur and fire.

Verse

Malbim

וַתַּבֵּט אִשְְְׁתּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו – But Lot’s wife looked back: Lot’s wife refused to heed the angel’s warning not to look back at Sedom, and she turned to watch the upheaval. As she watched the destruction, she too was struck by the plague obliterating the city, and she became a pillar of salt. That transformation is a sign of her wickedness, for her behavior was as evil as that of her neighbors.

Verse

Malbim

וַיַּשְְְׁכֵּם אַבְְְרָהָם בַּבֹּקֶר – Avraham rose early the next morning: This verse confirms that Lot’s merit alone was not enough to save him. After Lot had waited long enough for the plague in Sedom to begin, Lot would have been swept up in the destruction on his way to Tzoar. However, Avraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood in order to offer his morning prayers to God, [and that merit helped save Lot]. For Avraham was accustomed to praying at daybreak. On that day, Avraham arose before dawn and saw thick smoke rising from the land (verse 28). He was witnessing the beginning of the destruction.

Verse

Haamek Davar

וַיַּשְְְׁקֵף עַל־פְְּנֵי סְְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה – He looked down toward Sedom and Amora: Avraham did not see the smoke rising in the same way that another observer might see it. Avraham was too far from Sedom to see what was happening there in a normal way. Rather, Avraham was standing in a holy place where he had prayed on the previous day, and therefore he was able to see the event despite his distance.

Verse 29

וַיְְְהִי בְְּשַׁחֵת אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עָרֵי הַכִּכָּר וַיִּזְְְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־אַבְְְרָהָם וַיְְְשַׁלַּח אֶת־לוֹט מִתּוֹךְְְ הַהֲפֵכָה בַּהֲפֹךְְְ אֶת־הֶעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־יָשַׁב בָּהֵן לוֹט׃

So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, He remembered Avraham and brought Lot out of the overthrow that overturned the cities where Lot had lived.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

בְְּשַׁחֵת אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עָרֵי הַכִּכָּר –When God destroyed the cities of the plain: This verse seems to reflect Avraham’s thoughts about God’s actions. Usually, when someone unleashes anger and acts in a violent rage, the perpetrator’s children are not shown any compassion. Rather, the person acts cruelly, destroying everything associated with the offence. But that is not God’s way. When He destroyed the cities of the plain with sulfur and fire, in an unparalleled act of violence, He also remembered His covenant with Avraham, to give him Yitzḥak for a son. God also saved Lot. This matches the meaning of the verse: So it was that, when God destroyed… He remembered Avraham (verses 28–29). That is, Avraham saw that as God was destroying Sedom and its surroundings, God simultaneously recalled His promise to give Yitzḥak as a son to Avraham

Verse

Malbim

וַיֵּשֶׁב בָּהָר – And settled in the hills: Lot found no tent or shelter to protect him and his daughters. Therefore, he took refuge in a cave that he came across. The verse twice mentions that Lot had fled to the hills with his daughters, to emphasize that the family was sequestered alone, with no one else, which led to incestuous results. Indeed, the midrash maintains that Lot lusted after his daughters.

Haamek Davar

כִּי יָרֵא לָשֶׁבֶת בְְּצוֹעַר – Because he was afraid to stay in Tzoar: Though the angel had guaranteed Lot that he would not destroy Tzoar, Lot was skeptical regarding the angel’s promises. For Lot saw that the destruction had in fact begun before he had arrived in Tzoar, and he was afraid to stay there.

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman

כִּי יָרֵא לָשֶׁבֶת בְְּצוֹעַר – Because he was afraid to stay in Tzoar: It is not surprising that Lot was afraid to stay in Tzoar despite the fact that the angel had told him: I will not overthrow the town of which you speak (19:21). Lot’s attitude fits perfectly with the character he had demonstrated thus far. Just as Lot was skeptical and hesitant upon hearing news of the impending disaster, so too he was indecisive and fearful after the destruction began. Hence, Lot was afraid that Tzoar would also eventually be obliterated, if not immediately then perhaps once he had settled there. Therefore, he fled eastward into the mountains.

Verse 31

וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְְּעִירָה אָבִינוּ זָקֵן וְְאִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ לָבוֹא עָלֵינוּ כְְּדֶרֶךְְְ כָָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃

The elder said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is no man left on earth to come to us in the normal way of the world.

Shadal

וְְאִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ – There is no man left on earth: There was already an established settlement in the mountains when Lot fled there, which is how they managed to procure bread and wine. However, Lot was reluctant to live amongst those people. Perhaps he remembered that his association with the people of Sedom had put him in mortal danger. Thus, Lot chose to live in a cave, telling his daughters that they must avoid the men in the area. When the older sister said: *T*here is no man left on earth to come to us, she meant that there remains nobody worthy or appropriate who could marry us.

Haamek Davar

אָבִינוּ זָקֵן – Our father is old: The older sister said to the younger: It is unlikely that our father will agree to have relations with us if we merely try to seduce him. We should devise an alternate plan. וְְאִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ – There is no man left on earth: The daughters had surely seen some men during their brief stay in Tzoar. However, they feared that that town too would be destroyed, which is why they were afraid to remain there.

Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman

וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְְּעִירָה – The elder said to the younger: The older sister was not the first daughter born to Lot’s wife, but she was older than the sister she was with.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְְּעִירָה – The elder said to the younger: Lot’s daughter had something beautiful to contribute to the emerging personality of the King Messiah. What attribute did this girl possess that the Almighty chose her to be the great–great–grandmother of Ruth—and the Messiah, her descendant? Lot’s daughter was under the impression, says Rashi (verse 31), that a cosmic cataclysm had struck, and only three human beings had survived. She acted as she did because she wanted to save humanity. This girl wanted to rebuild the world, to start from scratch and raise another nation to take the place of the human race, which she believed had been destroyed simultaneously with the destruction of Sedom. This was heroism of an unimaginable caliber. Instead of giving up, she had the courage to try to rebuild the world, to make a new humanity arise from the ashes of Sedom. She convinced her younger sister to do the same. Never mind that their method was primitive and crude. These two girls took upon themselves an impossible task, something staggering and awesome. The plan per se was reprehensible, but their motivation was imaginative, noble, and heroic. The King Messiah will save the world. Indeed, he will achieve what his great–great–grand–mothers hoped to accomplish. The heroism of Lot’s daughters consisted of their commitment to mankind and their urge to save it. The great vision of a redeemed world would have been impossible had Lot’s daughters been destroyed in Sedom.

Verse 33

וַתַּשְְְׁקֶיןָ אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יַיִן בַּלַּיְְְלָה הוּא וַתָּבֹא הַבְְּכִירָה וַתִּשְְְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ וְְלֹא־יָדַע בְְּשִׁכְְְבָהּ וּבְְְקוּׄמָהּ׃

That night they gave their father wine to drink. Then the elder daughter went in and slept with him. He was unaware when she lay down and when she arose.

Malbim

וַתִּשְְְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ – And slept with him: Biblical Hebrew distinguishes between the phrases *lishkav et*, which appears in this verse, and *lishkav im*, which is used in verse 35. [Both terms are translated as: “to sleep with,” though they use different expressions to identify the object of the sentence.] The phrase *shakhav otah* – he slept with her, connotes only natural relations, whereas *shakhav immah* suggests both vaginal and anal relations. Furthermore, Scripture uses the phrase *shakhav im* when it wishes to be discreet. This is why the verse features language that demonstrates Lot’s older daughter’s brazenness. She took the initiative in sleeping with her father, and she had no shame, in fact naming her son after her father [Moav – “from father”]! First the verse says: Then the elder daughter went [vatavo] using a verb normally employed to discuss a man initiating sex with a woman. Second, the text states, *vatishkav et aviha*, meaning that she was intimate with her father and hid nothing from him. She was not at all reserved in her behavior. In contrast, the younger daughter was embarrassed about what she was doing and tried to cover up the indecency as much as she could. She named her son Ben Ami [“son of my nation”]. The verse describes the younger daughter’s actions as: *vatakom hatze’ira* [“the younger one went,”] and then uses the alternate form: *vatishkhav immo*, to indicate that she tried to hide what she was doing, since it was unnatural.

Haamek Davar

בַּלַּיְְְלָה הוּא – That night: Whenever the Torah uses this language [*balailah hu*, instead of the expected *balailah ha’hu*], it indicates that divine providence is involved.

Verse

Haamek Davar

הֵן־שָׁכַבְְְתִּי אֶמֶשׁ אֶת־אָבִי – Last night I slept with my father: The older sister mentioned her own action to emphasize its purpose of assuring that the human race would endure on earth. However, for her plan to succeed, the younger daughter had to conceive as well. What good would it do if the older woman gave birth to a child if there was no mate for that child to marry? The elder daughter hoped that the two sisters would produce a male and a female.

Verse 35

וַתַּשְְְׁקֶיןָ גַּם בַּלַּיְְְלָה הַהוּא אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יָיִן וַתָּקָָם הַצְְּעִירָה וַתִּשְְְׁכַּב עִמּוֹ וְְלֹא־יָדַע בְְּשִׁכְְְבָהּ וּבְְְקֻמָהּ׃

So that night they got their father to drink wine again, and the younger went and slept with him. And he was unaware when she lay down and when she arose.

Haamek Davar

וַתַּשְְְׁקֶיןָ גַּם בַּלַּיְְְלָה הַהוּא אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יָיִן – So that night they got their father to drink wine again: This order of the words in this verse is different than in the previous verse. [Verse 33 has the word “wine” after the word “their father,” while this verse switches that order and also adds the word *gam*,“also.”] This indicates that the women feared that on the second night Lot would refuse the wine they were forcing on him. Hence, the daughters first served their father other beverages before switching to wine. וַתָּקָָם הַצְְּעִירָה – And the younger went: The choice of verb [*vatakom*, literally, “and she got up"] reflects the fact that the younger daughter found the whole matter disagreeable. She only went along with the plan due to her sister’s insistence that she overcome her reluctance.

Verse

Meshekh Ḥokhma

הוּא אֲבִי־מוֹאָב עַד־הַיּוֹם – He is the ancestor of the Moabites of today: The condition of *mamzerut* [bastardy, created by incestuous or adulterous relations, prohibits offspring from marrying Jews who are not also *mamzerim*.] The illicit acts create a spiritual blemish on an individual which impairs the character of the person. The Sages state: Arrogance is a sign of being a *mamzer*. Lot’s elder daughter admitted that the wicked disposition that her son inherited from her father would remain an inherent personality trait in her son and his descendants, until today. Even though the law of *mamzerut* does not apply to gentiles [that is, should a Jewish woman have relations with a gentile, their child is not a *mamzer* and can marry an Israelite], we have evidence to support the approach that a female descendent of a *mamzer* is permitted to marry Jews after ten generations. Ruth, for example, married Boaz, and she was a tenth–generation descendant of Moav, who was the son of Lot and his daughter.

Verse

Malbim

וְְהַצְְּעִירָה גַם־הִוא יָלְְדָה בֵּן – The younger also had a son: Things did not go as planned for the two sisters. They did not produce a boy and a girl who could marry each other. Rather, both women gave birth to sons. This explains why the younger mother named her boy Ben Ami [“son my father”] rather than Moav [“from my father”]. The second child was not necessary to develop his father into a nation. The Torah teaches that providence helped him to grow into the nation of Amon, a large group that exists until today. Yet the Amonites are not named after Lot, their ancestor and founder, in the way that the descendants of Esav are called “People of Esav” or “Edom.” [Edom is an alternative name of Esav.] Lot’s sons received their own names: Amon and Moav.

Meshekh Ḥokhma

וְְהַצְְּעִירָה גַם־הִוא יָלְְדָה בֵּן – The younger also had a son: The descendants of Moav maintained the attribute of enticing others to sin. [Just as the older daughter persuaded her sister to commit incest, so did the women of Moav eventually seduce the Israelites, as related in Numbers 25:1–2.]

Chapter 20, verse 1

וַיִּסַּע מִשָּׁם אַבְְְרָהָם אַרְְְצָה הַנֶּגֶב וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין־קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיָּגָָר בִּגְְְרָר׃

Avraham then journeyed on to the Negev region, settling between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he lived as a stranger in Gerar.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין־קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר וַיָּגָָר בִּגְְְרָר – Settling between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he lived as a stranger in Gerar: The verb *vayeishev* [“settling”] connotes a permanent dwelling, while the term *vayagor* [“living”] suggests temporary settlement. Why does the text describe two contradictory actions? Avraham originally wished to isolate himself, creating space between his household and the surrounding towns and their inhabitants. Hence, he was initially drawn to the barrenness of the Negev desert. In the end, however, he lived among his close friends – Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre – men who granted him friendship and respect. Now, as Avraham aged, he returned once again to the Negev. He established his home between Kadesh and Shur, in a secluded region, in an uninhabited area, close to the Shur desert, in a place known as a total and desolate wasteland. Still, Avraham sought a connection with a city, and hence he would occasionally visit Gerar, the capital of the Philistine confederation. Based on this understanding, I propose that since Avraham and Sara were expecting a son, they chose to relocate their home. Yitzḥak needed to be educated in a remote environment, far from all harmful influences. Yet, when parents force their children to live in loneliness, completely isolated from others who can offer other ideas and approaches to life, they risk a different sort of mistake and court a particular kind of danger. If children are never exposed to any outlook other than what their parents offer, and they never witnesses any lifestyle that differs from their own, they cannot learn to distinguish or appreciate the teachings and values of their parents. Under those conditions, young people can fall prey to any new idea that they encounter in the wider world. Similarly, a claustrophobic person, locked in the house and fearing the outside air, will succumb to illness upon leaving home. That person needs to develop immunity to what lies outside. Therefore, Avraham’s son, who would inherit Avraham’s religious heritage, needed to visit a different atmosphere on occasion, in order to compare the society of non–believers to his parents’ spirituality. Avraham’s son needed to evaluate the different and the contrary, and to inoculate himself against their effects, all while strengthening his faith in his father’s beliefs and teachings. Hence, Avraham chose to live temporary in the capital city of the Philistines. The level of corruption there never reached the intensity and severity that it did within Canaan proper. This also explains why God did not condemn the Philistines to destruction and exile, whereas the Amorites were destined for oblivion once their wickedness had fully developed.

Haamek Davar

וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּין־קָדֵשׁ וּבֵין שׁוּר – Settling between Kadesh and Shur: Most of Avraham’s property was situated between Kadesh and Shur, but Avraham himself lived in Gerar, the capital city of the Philistine kingdom. Avraham moved there to promote awareness of God among its citizens. But Avraham did not wish to settle there permanently; he preferred to see himself and be seen as a foreigner.

Verse 2

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְְְרָהָם אֶל־שָׂרָה אִשְְְׁתּוֹ אֲחֹתִי הִוא וַיִּשְְְׁלַח אֲבִימֶלֶךְְְ מֶלֶךְְְ גְְּרָר וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שָׂרָה׃

There Avraham said of his wife Sara, “She is my sister.” Avimelekh, king of Gerar, sent for Sara and took her as his own.

Or Haḥayyim

אֲחֹתִי הִוא –She is my sister: At this point, Avraham did not instruct Sara to introduce herself as his sister before she was asked who she is. This differs from his earlier request to Sara prior to their arrival in Egypt. This is because the population of Egypt was ugly, and Sara’s beauty stood out immediately. Hence Avraham had to take greater precaution than he did now in Gerar. This explains why Pharoah did not accuse Avraham, but Avimelekh did, saying: What were you thinking of that you did such a thing? (20:10). Avimelekh’s citizens were not unusually unseemly, and there were attractive women who lived there. Nobody found it surprising to see Sara in Gerar. Later, Avimelekh would invite Avraham to dwell in his country, since he believed that the threat of future abduction was minimal. Such was not the case with Pharaoh, who feared that Sara would continue to draw unwanted attraction from the men of his land.

Haamek Davar

אֲחֹתִי הִוא – She is my sister: I previously argued that whenever Avraham travelled to a place to which he had not been directed by the word of God or by divine inspiration, he feared maltreatment at the hands of the locals. In those situations, Avraham worried that God’s promise to harm people who cursed him would not apply. Hence, Avraham now feared for his wife’s safety. However, when Avraham lived in Ḥevron, when he dwelled alongside his friends Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre, he was at peace, since his friends had his best interests at heart.

Verse

Or Haḥayyim

הִנְְּךָ מֵת – You will die: God said to Avimelekh: You deserve to die because of the woman you have taken. That is, God informed Avimelekh that Sara is married. [Should you ignore this warning, your death will be justified.]

Shadal

הִנְְּךָ מֵת – You will die: God said to Avimelekh: If you have relations with Sara and keep her from returning to her husband, you will be put to death, for she is a married woman. However, Avimelekh did not understand that God’s threat was conditional. He therefore protested: Lord, would You destroy an innocent nation?

Meshekh Ḥokhma

וְְהִוא בְְּעֻלַת בָּעַל –She is already married: God leveled two accusations against the king. First, Avimelekh had committed the sin of theft, as the Talmud in Sanhedrin (57a) determines: A gentile is liable for abducting another man’s wife under the framework of theft. This is what God meant when He said: You will die because of the woman you have taken. Second, when God said: She is already married, He was defining Avimelekh’s act as adultery, [which is a separate infraction.] Avimelekh responded that he acted with clean hands, claiming that he had not perpetrated any violence.

Verse 4

וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְְְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמַר אֲדֹנָי הֲגוֹי גַּם־צַדִּיק תַּהֲרֹג׃

Avimelekh had not gone near her, so he said, “Lord, would You destroy an innocent nation?

Or Haḥayyim

וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְְְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ – Avimelekh had not gone near her: [Why does the text use the expression “gone near her” to refer to his restraint?] This can be explained based on Rambam’s ruling in *Hilkhot Melakhim* (9:7): A gentile is not held culpable for having anal relations with the wife of a non–Jew, whereas he incurs the death penalty if commits the same act with a woman who is married to a Jew. Hence, Avimelekh did not have relations with Sara in any way, fearing that she might be married to a Jew. Now, why did Avimelekh accuse God of threatening the lives of his whole people, considering that God only said that the king himself would die? Furthermore, why did he proclaim his innocence if God had not announced His unconditional desire to kill the king? In fact, God said that Avimelekh would only deserve to die if he did have relations with her and refused to return her to Avraham. This makes sense in the context of the Sages explanation of the verse: And the Lord said: These have no masters. Let each man return home in peace [beshalom] (I Kings 22:17). They explain that the prophet Mikhayhu warned Aḥav, king of Israel, that only he would perish in war, while the rest of the people would survive to return home safely. Even though the prediction stated that Aḥav would be the only casualty of the battle, it was also said that the nation would come back *beshalom* – a term that can refer to death [as in the phrase, “rest in peace.”] The Sages explain that this shows that an entire nation suffers with the death of a monarch. That is why Avimelekh complained to God: Lord, would You destroy an innocent nation? [Were God to kill Avimelekh the entire kingdom would suffer.] Avimelekh then offered a second defense: I am completely innocent, and God should not kill an innocent person. [In other words, even if Avimelekh were not the king, whose death would affect thousands, he still does not deserve to die, having committed no wrong.] Avimelekh argued at length, because he believed that God had already decreed his death, for God said: You will die because of the woman you have taken. Avimelekh understood this to mean that he deserved to die because of the abduction alone.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

הֲגוֹי גַּם־צַדִּיק תַּהֲרֹג – Would you destroy an innocent nation: Avimelekh said to God: You have just finished punishing Sedom, and their main transgressions were the abuse they heaped upon outsiders and their rampant sexual licentiousness. Sedom was indeed guilty of perpetrating inhumane cruelty towards strangers, and they crossed all boundaries of promiscuity. Compared to Sedom, Gerar should be considered an “innocent nation.” After all, we allowed Avraham and Sara to live wherever they wanted in the country. Furthermore, it is possible that Avimelekh’s treatment of Sara was normal behavior toward a woman whom a man wished to marry.

Haamek Davar

וַאֲבִימֶלֶךְְְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ – Avimelekh had not gone near her: Sara had undoubtedly told the king that she was a married woman. Avimelekh was able to control his desire and did not go near her at all. הֲגוֹי גַּם־צַדִּיק תַּהֲרֹג – Would you destroy an innocent nation: Anyone who was close to Avraham or who associated with him was termed a “Hebrew,” and it was well known to everybody at that time that the Hebrews were beloved by God. It was well known that Avraham’s clan depended on God’s protection, and that they served Him in all aspects of their lives. In contrast, the rest of the nations, who did not enjoy this relationship with God, were known as *goyim*. That is what Avimelekh meant when he protested: Would you destroy an innocent nation, i.e. a nation that does not observe the laws of the Hebrews. After all, we have not been commanded to follow the lifestyle that Avraham has accepted. Would You kill the innocent just because they are not among your beloved Hebrews?

Verse 5

הֲלֹא הוּא אָמַר־לִי אֲחֹתִי הִוא וְְהִיא־גַם־הִוא אָמְְרָה אָחִי הוּא בְְּתָָם־לְְבָבִי וּבְְְנִקְְְיֹן כַּפַּי עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת׃

Did he not tell me, ‘She is my sister’? Did she not say, ‘He is my brother’? I have acted from an innocent heart, with clean hands.”

Or Haḥayyim

וּבְְְנִקְְְיֹן כַּפַּי – I have acted with clean hands: Avimelekh defended himself and said: I sincerely believed that they would be pleased if I marry that woman. What brother would not want his sister to wed a king?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

בְְּתָָם־לְְבָבִי וּבְְְנִקְְְיֹן כַּפַּי – From an innocent heart, with clean hands: Many people, Avimelekh among them, believe that noble intentions are enough, and therefore they cannot be blamed for their actions. According to that approach, behavior is only judged based on the purity of motive. This is not the Torah’s approach. The ethics of our actions depends on whether they accord with God’s will, not only on the thoughts of the one who acts. The prophet states: Man, God has told you what is good and what the Lord seeks from you (Micah 6:8). Indeed, obedience takes precedence over ethical considerations. Furthermore, an honorable motivation cannot convert a negative action into a positive one. Even if one’s rationale for acting is correct, behavior becomes criminal when it veers into undesirable activities. A person who imagines that something is permitted, can still act sinfully, even though we might see the sin as partially mitigated. Every person must learn what is right, and Avimelekh did not do so. This point is reflected in the Sages’ statement: An ignorant person is not righteous. For somebody with no knowledge and who has made no attempts to define what exactly God wants, is nothing less than a criminal. Based on this understanding, the Sages explain Avimelekh’s behavior. Avimelekh was obligated to investigate the matter, and he did not. In his own defense, Avimelekh maintained that Avraham told him this, and that Sara told him that, but he thereby admitted that he had not asked what God would have wanted him to do under those circumstances. Even if it were true that Sara was Avraham’s unmarried sister, does that give the king the right to seize her for himself? Are all unmarried women available to satisfy the king’s lust? Even if that was normative behavior in Gerar, it is still not proper. The king of any land must set a moral standard and must serve as a model for proper ethics.