חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

AVRITCH · BAT AYIN, VAYERA

Why does God personally go down to see the sinners of Sodom?

Bat Ayin

Drawing on the Zohar's reading of "I will go down and see," the Bat Ayin presents God's concern in Sodom as mercy: God wanted Avraham to know that He personally descends from level to level to stir sinners to teshuvah, and that Avraham's plea for justice is really a plea for even greater mercy, so that even a small number of penitent individuals would be accepted and the city spared. AI SUMMARY

"Shall I conceal from Avraham that which I am doing, etc." "Far be it from You to judge all the earth, etc." (Bereshit 18:25). One may say as follows. Why did God say "Shall I conceal"? Surely it is a matter that is bound to be revealed. There is a further difficulty: at the very beginning of Avraham's conversation with God, he began with harsh words, saying "Far be it from You, etc." And there is yet another difficulty: how could Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him, judge the Creator, blessed be He, for doing such a thing, putting a tzaddik (righteous one) to death along with the wicked?

To understand this: what the Creator, blessed be He, mainly wanted to make known to Avraham, His beloved, was not the destruction and overturning of Sodom. Rather, He wanted to make known to him the greatness of His kindness, may He be blessed, in the matter of teshuvah (return, repentance).

This is what the Creator, blessed be He, said to him: "The outcry of Sodom and Amorah, etc." That is to say: you know that the people of Sodom are very wicked and sinful, and nevertheless I do not desire their death but rather that they return from their ways, etc. Moreover, I Myself will arouse their hearts to teshuvah.

This is what Scripture means by "I will go down and see." That is to say, I will descend from level to level (as it is stated in the Zohar, Part I, p. 105b), and I will arouse their hearts to teshuvah. "And afterward I will see whether, according to the outcry that has come to Me, they have done": that is to say, if they have done teshuvah in proportion to the outcry of sin that has come to Me, meaning that they have done great and excellent teshuvah in proportion to the damage of the sin, then "kalah": that is to say, I will wipe away and finish off their iniquity.

And if they do not do teshuvah to that degree, "eda'ah": that is to say, to forgive in proportion to the teshuvah, with a little suffering. Avraham did not know of this kindness, that God Himself arouses the hearts of sinners to teshuvah.

When Avraham heard the greatness of His kindness, may He be blessed, Avraham said: if the attribute of chesed (lovingkindness) is so great, then even if not all of them do teshuvah, but only ten per city, that is, individuals, the teshuvah of an individual will also be accepted teshuvah. And so he said, "Far be it from You; shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" That is to say, "justice, it is mercy" (Zohar, Part III, p. 91a). The explanation is: since You are merciful to the earth, descending from level to level to arouse their hearts to teshuvah, it is fitting for You to be even more merciful, so that even

if only ten per city do teshuvah it will be accepted, and likewise when a number of individuals do teshuvah, the teshuvah of an individual will also be accepted.

This is what he meant by "chalilah": he thought that because the essence of teshuvah lies in arousal from Above, He would therefore not accept the teshuvah of an individual. About this he prayed, "Shall the Judge of all the earth..." That is to say, in accordance with the greatness of Your kindness and mercy, may Your kindness be increased to this as well. And the Creator, blessed be He, answered him that so it is: even if a number of individuals do teshuvah, it will be accepted before Me, and I will not destroy.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)

