

Rabbo Kacev
for Shabbat 15 November 2008

PARSHAT VAYEIRA
FITTING THE MOULD

There is a well known Midrash (Talmud Sanhedrin 109a) which tells that when travelers would come to Sodom they would be given a bed. If they were too long, they would shorten the person by chopping off their feet and if they were too short they would stretch the person. What a strange midrash, knowing that it is not to be taken literally what could it mean? Why would they get involved in such a strange practice?

Many traditions are passed down regarding the traits of the people of Sodom. One explains that they would say the following: “Take a look how there is food leaving our city, silver and gold are being removed from the city..it is preferable that no people come our way for they simply cause us to lose so let us prohibit everyone from entering” This trait is defined in Pirkei Avot (chapter 5) to be a world view of, “What is ours is ours and what is yours is yours”. They hated and distanced the stranger, the outsider.

Rabbi Kosovski (Shabbat U'moed) says that Chazal are describing a political outlook. The outlook of a society that does not allow outsiders, encouraging xenophobia so as to stop them from stealing jobs and taking away resources. This is the meaning of the initial midrash. They would only accept those who fitted the mould. If you made it in, you had to behave like them. **Being too long or too short is the metaphor for being different, holding another view.** A bed symbolizes someone who was dwelling in the city and be warned, to dwell here you better fit in.

The bed of Sodom is an off shoot of the trait of Sodom. A world view based upon serving the self, self interests and self gain. Just the opposite of Avraham striving for Tzedakah and Mishpat.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Kacev