



# TIPPING THE SCALES

*We find Abraham and Lot on two sides of the political extremes—and with each came a tipping point.*

## Two Extremes

In recent years, a political trend has emerged in many countries, marked by rising extremism on both ends of the spectrum. On one side, the militant far-right is gaining momentum, while on the other, the radical left is also intensifying. Both sides appear to be pushing their views further toward the extremes.

In this week's Torah portion, we also see an incredible contrast between two extremes. On one side, there's Avraham Avinu, the ultimate man of kindness. The Midrash tells us that he'd go out of his way to welcome guests—his tent had doors on all sides so no one would miss it, and he was constantly looking to help others, even putting himself at risk.

On the other side, we have Sodom and Amora, societies completely opposite to Avraham's values. In Sodom, they had actual laws against helping others! The Gemara in Sanhedrin explains how their justice system worked: if someone hurt another person by throwing a rock, the courts would rule that the injured person owed the attacker money, as if they had done him a "favor" by drawing blood!

There's a story about Eliezer, Avraham's servant, who went to Sodom and got hurt. When he took it to court, the judge ruled that Eliezer had to pay the attacker for "bloodletting." Eliezer then hit the judge with a stick and said, "Pay him with what you owe me, and I'll keep my own money!"

The contrast is stark—Avraham, the symbol of kindness, lived right next door to Sodom, a place defined by cruelty. The Torah tells us that Avraham chose to live nearby, maybe hoping he could influence them. We know from the previous portion that the people of Sodom were

“very wicked,” and the Midrash (Rabbah, 49:6) says that G-d warned them for 25 years to change their ways, but they refused.

In this portion, though, we see Sodom’s destruction. So, what changed? The Gemara, Midrash ((Pirkei D’Rebbe Eliezer, ch. 25), and Rashi explain that it was a small act of kindness by Plotit, Lot’s daughter, that finally sealed Sodom’s fate. Her kindness was so out of place in Sodom that it brought about the city’s ultimate downfall.

## **The Story**

In Sodom, there was a law forbidding anyone from giving charity or even food to the poor. If a homeless person came to town and had nothing to eat, he would eventually starve to death. One day, a poor man arrived in Sodom, but after a few days, the townspeople noticed he was still alive. This meant that someone had to be secretly helping him, breaking Sodom’s strict laws.

The authorities investigated and discovered that it was Lot’s daughter, Plotit, who was secretly giving the man a small piece of bread each day. Why would she risk so much to help him? It turns out that Plotit had grown up in Lot’s household, and although Lot chose to live in Sodom, he hadn’t fully lost the positive influence from his time living near Avraham. Rashi comments on the verse “and Lot saw” (Bereishis 19:1), noting that Lot had learned the value of hosting guests from Avraham’s home. This kindness left a mark on him, and it extended to his daughter, who felt compassion for the poor man, even though it put her in danger.

When Plotit was caught, the townspeople sentenced her to a horrific death. Rashi explains on the verse, “the cry of [Sodom]” (Bereishis 18:21), that “our Sages taught it was the cry of a girl whom they killed in a cruel way because she gave food to a poor man.” The Midrash describes her punishment: they smeared her with honey and tied her up on a rooftop, where bees stung her to death. Her cries reached the heavens, and they became the final tipping point for Sodom’s destruction. This, then, was what brought about Sodom’s downfall—the act of kindness that violated the city’s harsh laws was what sealed its fate.

## **On The Flip Side**

On the positive side, we see a similar idea with Avraham Avinu. Even though Avraham had already been promised, years earlier at the Covenant Between the Parts, that he would have children, it still took a long time for that blessing to come to fruition. Avraham received

repeated promises from G-d that he would have a son with Sarah, yet the fulfillment of this blessing seemed to be delayed.

In our portion, we read about the extraordinary moment that finally tipped the scale. Just three days after Avraham circumcised himself, while he was still in pain, he sat outside his tent hoping for guests. G-d appeared to visit and heal him, a very special, personal visit. Yet even as Avraham was having this divine encounter, he noticed three travelers—strangers and idol worshippers—approaching. Without hesitation, Avraham left G-d's presence and ran to invite these guests into his tent, setting aside the spiritual experience for the mitzvah of hospitality.

Rashi explains that this very act of kindness, done while Avraham was in great pain, was what finally brought about the birth of Yitzchak, noting that Avraham's strength returned that day (Bereishis 18:8). The Maggid of Mezritch even taught that true merit for children can come through the mitzvah of hosting guests (see Igros Kodesh, Vol. 4, p. 30).

So what can we learn from all of this?

Often, people share with me that their decision to live a Jewish life, or to marry a Jewish spouse, was strongly influenced by something they saw their parents do. Many remember a specific moment from their childhood—a small event that left a lasting impression. This wasn't always a dramatic incident; it could have been a simple conversation between parents and children or a meaningful holiday experience that made them feel the importance of being Jewish. The parents, in those moments, weren't necessarily trying to leave a lasting impression; they were just living Jewishly. But you never know which mitzvah or action will resonate deeply with a child.

This is why we should consistently engage in all types of mitzvos—because we never know which one will leave an imprint on our children that lasts a lifetime. As the Rambam famously says, "When a person performs one mitzvah, they tip themselves and the entire world to the side of merit, bringing salvation and deliverance to all."