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## MIDRESHET LINDENBAUM, YERUSHALAYIM



*Midreshet Lindenbaum offers inspiring learning at the highest level with friends from all over the world, in our sunlit Beit Midrash on our beautiful campus in the Arnona neighborhood in Jerusalem. Dynamic and approachable faculty members create connections with the students that last a lifetime, and trips throughout Israel develop a deep connection to the Land and State of Israel.*



**Rabbanit Sally Mayer**  
Rosh Midrasha,  
Midreshet

### Lindenbaum

### Midat Sodom

Must we share what is rightfully ours? The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (5:10) discusses various perspectives people might have on their material belongings. One who keeps what is his and also wants to take what belongs to others is wicked; and one who does not covet what others have and also shares what he owns is a *chasid*, an especially pious person. What about the person who says, “What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours”? One opinion says that this is the average person – not particularly generous, but not terrible either. The second opinion calls this approach “midat sedom” – the quality of Sodom. Why such a strong condemnation,

comparing someone who simply wants to enjoy what is his without taking from others to a city that was irredeemably evil and utterly destroyed?

In Parshat Vayeira, when the angels visit Avraham, he runs to greet them in the heat of the day, despite his advanced age and his recent *brit milah*. He offers them to sit and have a crust of bread before continuing on their journey, and then rushes to prepare a beautiful feast of cakes, butter, milk and meat. He involves his household in the endeavor, as his wife Sara bakes the cakes and a young man in his household prepares the meat. After parting from Avraham, the angels continue to Sodom, and Lot finds them in the street. He, too, invites them into his home, insisting that they sleep there rather than in the street, and bakes them *matzot* to eat. We see the parallel to Avraham – looking for guests, and insisting on helping them even when they try to refuse – Lot learned

hachnasat orchim as he grew up in his uncle Avraham's home after the death of his father.

Unfortunately, the people of Sodom are not happy with Lot's kindness to strangers, and they surround the house, demanding that the guests be brought out "so we may know them." This sounds like they plan to violate these guests, which is confirmed when Lot insists on protecting the guests, instead offering them his two daughters, "who have never known a man." It turns out that Lot missed a few lessons in Avraham's home. He protects the guests, but at the expense of his own daughters, offering them to the marauding mob. When looking at the details of his *hachnasat orchim*, we also notice that he seems to have less enthusiasm than Avraham, "getting up" to greet them instead of the multiple expressions of Avraham's running, and baking simple *matzot* rather than an elaborate feast. Lot moved to Sodom after seeing the beautiful and lush land, the amazing material goodness there. Just after he makes the choice, the Torah adds as a postscript, "And the people of Sodom were evil and sinning to God very much." Lot's choice of material comfort without considering the qualities of the place had a deleterious effect on his own *middot* – he ends up perhaps a greater person than anyone else in Sodom, but ultimately not particularly laudable. When



his daughters later get him drunk so they can have children with him, it seems like a "measure for measure" punishment for Lot – he offered them to the mob, but he is ultimately the one who is compromised.

If Sodom is the place where it is prohibited to even welcome guests, where violating guests is normal and offering family members as victims is the behavior of the best of them, why then does the Mishna call it *midat sedom* to simply allow others to have what is theirs and to keep what is one's own?

The prophet Yechezkel (16:49) explains to the Jewish people what Sodom's sin was – "...This was the sin of Sodom your sister: pride, abundance of bread, and careless ease were hers and her daughters', and she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." Sodom's incredible comfort led its people to forget what Avraham knew well – what we have is a gift from God, and is indeed meant for us to enjoy, but to use to help others with their needs as well. Avraham was wealthy without being haughty, but it was Avraham's trait of humility that made him able to share generously and joyously, thinking of the guests' needs and not only his own. Sodom became lost in its material wealth, and in haughtiness forgot about God, and became uncaring to others, ignoring the needs of the passing traveler and the cries of the poor. The Mishna in Pirkei Avot reminds us to follow Avraham Avinu, to think of what we have not as something only for our own enjoyment, but as a gift from Hashem to be used to bring joy to others as well. ■