

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Fri. Evening 6:22 pm

Services

Saturday Oct. 31 9:30 am

Thursday Morning minyan followed by Bagels and Bible will begin Dec. 3 at 8:30 am.

The election in Israel is over. It is a strange political system where people vote for a political party, seats in the K'nesset are allocated by percentage of vote, and the parties must form coalitions before they can choose a prime minister. We still do not know whether the prime minister will still be Bibi Netanyahu or his opponent, Gadi Eisenkot. Meanwhile, midterm elections here are in a few days. Be sure to vote.

Here is a link for my High Holiday sermons this year. [High Holiday Sermons](#)

PARSHAT VAYERA
FOUR ATTITUDES TOWARDS MONEY

“They shouted to Lot and said to him, Where are the ones who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may be intimate with them.” (Genesis 19:5)

This week I want to teach one of my favorite passages from the Talmud (Avot 5:10). It teaches about four different attitudes towards money. But it is also the best explanation of the evil of the city of Sodom, destroyed in this week's portion. Let me transliterate the original Hebrew and then give the English translation, because the Hebrew is quite poetic.

Arba Midot BeAdam. “There are four types of human beings [regarding money]:”

First: *HaOmer Sheli Sheli, Shelchah Shelchah, Zo Midat Binonit.* *Yesh Omrim Zo Midat S'dom.* “Someone who say, what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours, this is a mediocre person. Some say this was the way of Sodom.” A mediocre person hoards their money but does not try to steal someone else's money. Everyone can keep what they have but no one can share. A mediocre person never gives to anyone else.

This was the way of Sodom. People had money but no one shared with anyone else, particularly strangers. Visitors were not welcome in Sodom, and no one would give to a person in need. I often say that Sodom was the first gated community. According to the Midrash, the people of Sodom would invite someone to stay in a bed in their home. If the bed was too long for their legs, they would stretch them out. If their legs were too long for the bed, they would cut off their legs (Sanhedrin 109b). The Greek myth of Procrustes tells the same story. People speak of a

Procrustes Bed as a situation where people are forced into a situation for which they do not fit.

Let me share a true story based on this Midrash. I was flying home from Israel on El Al in an airplane seat without enough leg room for me. The Israeli in front of me kept trying to push his seat back on me and I kept pushing it forward. Finally in anger, he turned to me and screamed in Hebrew, "You should visit Sodom. They would take care of your legs." He was a jerk, but he knew his Midrash.

Second: *Sheli Shelchah, Shelchah Sheli, Am HaAretz*. "What is mine is yours, what is yours is mine, is a fool." These are people who want to remove private property altogether. Let everybody share everything. This was Karl Marx's view of the perfect communist society. Everybody would share everything. Or to quote Marx, "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." All property belonged to everything in common. Already the Talmud realized that a society with no private property cannot work.

Wherever this extreme form of socialism has been tried, it has not succeeded. One only needs to look at the former Soviet Union. Socialism is failing in Cuba and Venezuela. Even one of the noblest experiments in community ownership of everything, the Israeli kibbutz, eventually failed. Today most kibbutzim (the plural of kibbutz) are returning to private enterprise and private property. These socialist communities

Third: *Sheli Shelchah, Shelchah Shelchah, Hasid*. "What is mine is yours and what is yours is yours, is a pious person." Piety is realizing that all the property we own is a gift from God. It is given to us on condition that we share it with others. In some ultimate sense, nothing is truly ours except our ability to do good in the world.

Fourth: *Sheli Sheli, Shelchah Sheli, Rasha*. "What is mine is mine and what is yours is mine, this is a wicked person." On the other hand, there are people who are never satisfied with what they have and are always trying to acquire what other people have. They should listen to another famous passage in Pirke Avot, "Who is rich? Someone who is satisfied with their lot" (Avot 4:1).

There is so much wisdom in this short, pithy passage describing four approaches to money. It is as relevant today as in the third century of the Common Era, when the Rabbis developed this passage.