

# Parsha Story

Stories and Parables from  
the famed Maggid of Dubno  
by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

## The Tzadikim of S'dom

VAYEIRA

Rabbi Eliyahu, the renowned Gaon of Vilna, once put the Dubner Maggid in a difficult spot. "Please rebuke me for my faults", he asked. "I wish to be wise, and it is written, 'Reprove a wise man and he will love you' (Mishlei 9:8)."

The Maggid was taken aback at the Gaon's request. What criticism could be leveled against this spiritual giant, the preeminent Talmudic scholar of his day, an extraordinarily pious man who spent every waking moment diligently studying Torah in his Beit Midrash?

After a few moments of thought, however, the Maggid agreed. He requested only that he not be considered brazen for speaking against his master.

## The Righteous of S'dom

It is written, the Maggid began, that Avraham pleaded with God not to destroy the evil city of S'dom – if fifty righteous people could be found who lived "in the midst of the city" (B'reishit 18:24). God agreed to

Avraham's request, using the same expression, that the righteous individuals be "in the midst of the city". In fact, this phrase is repeated several times in the account. The text of the Torah is precise; no letter is extraneous. Why not just write, "righteous in the city"? Why must they be B'TOCH HA'IR - "in the midst of the city"?

The Maggid continued:

In my humble opinion, this phrase is exact and is mentioned for a specific reason. Avraham was referring to righteous people who are in the midst of the city – concerned, upright citizens who visit the shops and public places, who watch over the town's day-to-day life.

There probably were fifty righteous in S'dom's Beit Midrash, scholars who studied Torah all day long and complacently thought to themselves, "I have saved my own soul." But those scholars would not have saved the city of S'dom. Avraham understood that there needed to be righteous who were "in the midst of the city". Only upright individuals who were involved in the town's everyday matters, who supervised its spiritual and moral affairs, would warrant saving the city from destruction.

Scholars who are locked away with their books, with little influence on their neighbors – and here the Maggid

indirectly rebuked the Vilna Gaon, who consistently refused to accept any communal position – such scholars are not the righteous people of whom Avraham spoke.

*Adapted from Meshalim veSipurim, pp. 270-271*