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ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER:
DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

MODULE ONE

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

1.1 THE STORY

1.1.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This module is intended as a didactic framework for the theme “Encounter with the Other”. The material is suitable for the age groups from 13 to 18 years. The module gives the opportunity to the teacher or facilitator to elaborate on this theme at their discretion.

This module covers important topics such as hospitality, justice and standing up for the (strange) other. Starting with a story from the Torah, we learn how Judaism can give shape to these topics.

The student manual, together with watching the video clip, takes an hour. Afterwards, the topic can be explored in depth using additional material found in this handbook.

1.1.2 CONTENTS OF THE MODULE

The module focuses on the story of the downfall of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18-19. G-d hears a rumor that these sister cities are evil, and after an inspection by two angels, the two cities are razed to the ground. Yet the exact sins of Sodom and Gomorrah are not immediately clear. In this module we look at Jewish interpretations of this story.

The module makes a distinction between ‘basic study material’ and ‘in-depth study material’. The student handbook and the teacher handbook run parallel in terms of basic material, with the teacher’s handbook offering additional background information. The in-depth material offers additional material for the teacher or supervisor to elaborate on certain themes.

In the basic study material, we look at the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the possible Jewish interpretations. The teacher or facilitator is encouraged to relate the content to contemporary events and challenges as much as possible. The in-depth curriculum first explores the notion of justice and the folktales surrounding the famous *Tzadikim Nistarim*. These folktales about the ‘36 hidden righteous’ find their origin in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. This is followed by a section on the historical context of the Tanakh stories and the historic notion of hospitality. The module concludes with a glossary and a bibliography.

1.2 THE DOWNFALL OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

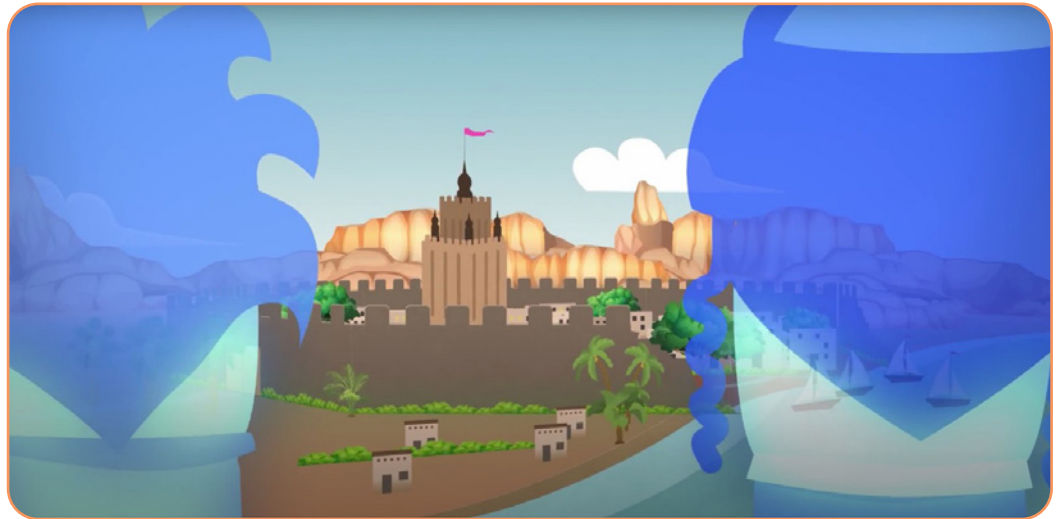


Figure 1.1
The Video Clip

1.2.1 THE STORY After an apartment block burns down, the nearby school organizes a fundraiser to assist the victims. Aaron, a Jewish boy, refuses to offer help. The apartment block has many migrants. Aaron thinks they are only here to profit from others, and are thus undeserving of help.

Aaron's reason for not helping has to do with a peculiar Torah story: the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The burning down of the apartment block, like the burning down of Sodom and Gomorrah, is a punishment from G-d. Levi, a fellow Jewish student, doubts Aaron's interpretation. Together they enter the story in search of its meaning.

1.2.2 DISCUSSION The following questions can possibly serve as an introduction to the lesson.

- What did you think of the story?
- Is the story relatable?
- Do you think Aaron interprets the story of Sodom and Gomorrah correctly?
- Do you identify more with Aaron or with Levi?
- Did you already know the story of Sodom and Gomorrah?

1.2.3 SUMMARY OF THE STORY OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is described in Genesis 19. However, the story actually begins in Gen. 18. There we meet Abraham, who is visited by three guests. Abraham is with his household in Mamre, not far from what is today known as the Dead Sea. G-d is also present. It is unclear whether G-d is all three guests, or just one of the three, accompanied by two angels or humans. Abraham receives his guests generously. He jumps up, runs over to them, bows down, offers every comfort, washes their feet, and along with his wife Sarah, prepares a sumptuous meal. For this they even slaughter a calf, which would have been an economic disaster in those days. At the end of His stay, G-d blesses Abraham and Sarah by promising them a child.

When two guests leave, G-d stays behind with Abraham: they look out over the valley in which Sodom and Gomorrah lie. G-d decides to communicate His intention to Abraham: He learned of the evil nature of these two cities, and makes an inspection. If the rumor is true, He will completely destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham, however, has some reservations, and therefore makes supplication. If G-d destroys the city, the righteous (and innocent) will also lose their lives. That would be unjust. After all, G-d is the Righteous One par excellence, and is considered the ultimate Judge of the world. Abraham wants to make sure that G-d saves the entire city in the name of the possible righteous who live there. G-d agrees: if Sodom contains at least ten righteous people, He will not destroy the city.

Meanwhile, in Sodom, two angels arrive. The text suggests that these are the two guests who were also guests of Abraham earlier in the story. Lot, not coincidentally Abraham's cousin, invites the two angels to his home as guests. The trouble appears when the men of Sodom come knocking furiously. They demand the guests. The text states unequivocally that they want to commit severe violence against the two angels. Lot even offers his daughters, but the people of Sodom want no part of it. Eventually the angels blind the crowd to neutralize the danger. Afterwards, they communicate to Lot the reason for their sending. They are sent by G-d to inspect the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Because of the violent incident, they obtained enough information: the cities are heading for their destruction. As a reward for the ethical hospitality, the angels allow Lot and his family to escape to the nearby city of Zoar.

1.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE TORAH STORY

1.3.1 THE HOSPITALITY OF ABRAHAM AND LOT

This section is **basic study material**.

A striking element of the story is the way Abraham and Lot receive the three strangers. Hospitality was an important part of nomadic existence in the ancient Near East (see the in-depth section “Back in Time”). Both Abraham and Lot welcome their guests. However, there is a difference in how Lot receives his guests compared to Abraham.

Jon D. Levenson in his book *Inheriting Abraham* expresses it as follows:

“Abraham walks; Lot merely stands up. Abraham sacrifices water and food; Lot does not. And the food that Abraham actually provides - “...” as well as the cakes he commands Sarah to bake quickly - contrast with Lot’s “banquet,” of which only “baked unleavened bread” (18:6-8;19:3) is mentioned as an item... The greatest contrast lies in the initial purpose of the two men’s visit. The visit to Abraham has the purpose of announcing a birth; that to Lot has the purpose of announcing an impending death.”

Abraham and Lot, in their hospitality, stand up for the stranger or other. That standing up for the other is the thread that connects Abraham’s plea for the righteous with his hospitable reception of three strangers. Lot’s reception of the two guests, and the protection he offers them, is rewarded with an escape from destruction.

The Torah places great importance on the proper treatment of strangers. Indeed, on Passover, Jews reread Exodus 23:9.

“You are not to oppress a foreigner, for you know how a foreigner feels, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.”

This commandment is repeated 36 times in the Torah. Another example is found in Leviticus 19:33-34.

“If a foreigner stays with you in your land, do not do him wrong. Rather, treat the foreigner staying with you like the native-born among you – you are to love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt; I am *Adonai* your God.”

1.3.2 THE DOUBT OF THE LORD

The Lord doubts whether He should share His plans with Abraham. This doubt has to do with Abraham's election: as the patriarch of the Lord's people, He should behave well and righteously. It seems that the Lord wants to shield Abraham from the evil of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those who do not come into contact with evil cannot be tempted by it. Therefore, it is striking that the Lord ultimately chooses to communicate His plan. The reason is again Abraham's election. As the patriarch of G-d's people, he must set the right example so that Jewish people begin on good terms. That means following the Word of G-d and acting righteously. After all, the election carries with it an ethical obligation, but Abraham can only make the right choice if he is placed before a choice in the first place. By communicating His plans to Abraham, the Lord offers to him the opportunity to make the right choice. That means: to choose righteousness. Only then is Abraham's good character tested and proven.

So we can interpret Abraham's intervention as an act of justice! The Lord communicates His plans to Abraham, and Abraham denounces the injustice of those plans. In doing so, Abraham commits himself to the principle of justice, and fulfills the condition for being the patriarch of the chosen people.

1.3.3 OUR ENVIRONMENT

Lot may offer hospitality and protection to two strangers, but he is not entirely cut off from the evil nature of Sodom. The text suggests that the city also tainted Lot's moral soul. Lot, for example, sacrifices his own daughters to protect his guests. Even though this underscores the importance of hospitality in the culture of the ancient Near East, this passage remains shocking to contemporary readers. Furthermore, compared to Abraham's, Lot's reception of the two strangers is less noteworthy. The difference may have to do with their location. Lot lives in the city of Sodom; Abraham lives near Mamre, in a tent in the wilderness. The story can teach us something about the interaction between humans and their environment. **The environment in which we find ourselves influences our behavior.** Lot lived in an evil culture, full of people with bad intentions toward each other, and this also marked him.

1.3.4 ABRAHAM'S CHUTZPAH

Abraham does not accept G-d's plan without question and makes a supplication. His intervention fits within the Jewish tradition of the '**chutzpah**', the critical frankness that cries out to G-d, against G-d, and in the name of G-d's creation and the covenant. It involves a kind of candid sincerity with which a Jew, as a full partner of the covenant, enters into discussion with the other partner, G-d.

The Lord, upon hearing the news of Sodom's wickedness, must intervene. As the Just, Righteous, and Non-indifferent, He cannot possibly remain neutral and stand aside. The plan to destroy the entire two cities was therefore devised with justice in mind. Abraham's plea, however, points to a major problem: justice can turn into its own opposite. A plan to target the guilty can also victimize the innocent. "Avraham approached and said, "Will you actually sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen. 18:23)

Abraham's proposal is very remarkable. Whereas the Lord wanted to destroy the whole city for the sake of the unrighteous, Abraham wants to see the whole city spared for the sake of the righteous. Abraham completely reverses the radical, extreme plan. He offers no compromise. The unjust are saved thanks to the righteous. In doing so, the Torah underscores the absolute nature of justice. As if justice carried the existence of the world on its shoulders!

We can see Abraham's supplication as a concrete yet extreme form of hospitality. It is not the hospitality that receives friends for dinner, but the hospitality that stands up for the other and the stranger. It is not a coincidence that Abraham sets the example here. As we saw above, G-d hesitates and decides to communicate His plans to Abraham out of the consideration that as the patriarch of the Chosen People, he must lead by example. Throughout the Tanakh, there are texts that underscore the universal status of this role.

Gen. 12:2-3

"I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Gen. 17:4

"As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations."

Gen. 18:18

"inasmuch as Avraham is sure to become a great and strong nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by him?"

1.3.5 THE EVIL OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas labels Abraham as the “patriarch of universal humanity” [*patriarche de l’humanité universelle*]. Abraham’s actions are very important, and teach us a **lesson about hospitality, standing up for the other, protecting the stranger, and the importance of justice!**

Abraham’s plea unfortunately fell on deaf ears. The inhabitants of Sodom come to violently attack the angels at Lot’s home. It is immediately clear that there are no ten righteous to be found. The threshold with which G-d agreed has not been reached. Abraham’s extreme proposal - to spare all the inhabitants for the sake of a few righteous people - falls apart. Yet G-d does not return to His first extreme plan either: to kill all the inhabitants for the sake of the unrighteous. A handful of inhabitants, Lot and his family, are rewarded for their hospitality and protection, and are allowed to take refuge in a small nearby town called Zoar. This makes it appear that G-d did respond to Abraham’s plea.

The story is not clear on what **the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah** are. This makes interpreting difficult. The Tanakh does have a number of passages that mention the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. These give an indication of what the sister cities are guilty of.

1.3.6 EZEKIEL 16:49-50

The book of Ezekiel describes Sodom’s sins as pride and turning the back on the poor and needy in times of affluence.

[49] The crimes of your sister S’dom were pride and gluttony; she and her daughters were careless and complacent, so that they did nothing to help the poor and needy.

[50] They were arrogant and committed disgusting acts before me; so that when I saw it, I swept them away.

1.3.7 JEREMIAH 23:14

The sins of Jerusalem are compared to Sodom and Gomorrah in the book of Jeremiah, and listed as adultery, lying, and encouraging evildoers.

But in the prophets of Yerushalayim
I have seen a horrible thing –
they commit adultery, live in lies,
so encouraging evildoers
that none returns from his sin.
For me they have all become like S'dom,
its inhabitants like 'Amora."

1.3.8 AMOS 4:1, 11

The book of Amos makes a comparison between Sodom and Ancient Israel. Throughout that comparison, the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah is described as mistreating the poor and oppressing the needy.

[1] "Listen, you [lovely] cows of Bashan,
who live on Mount Shomron,
who oppress the poor and grind down the needy,
who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink'

[11] "I overthrew some of you,
as when God overthrew S'dom and 'Amora;
you were like a burning stick snatched from the fire;
still you haven't returned to me," says Adonai.

In summary, the main sin of Sodom is hostility to the outsiders. They were cruel to the poor and to strangers, and they were unwilling to share their own wealth and resources. In other words, they were unjust.

The contrast between the vocation of Abraham (Jews) and the practice of Sodom could not be greater: justice as mission versus injustice as practice, moral excellence versus immorality.



Figure 1.2
Source: © Bignai /
Adobe Stock

1.3.6 DIDACTIC SUGGESTIONS

The following questions can be discussed with the students.

The hospitality of Abraham and Lot

- Read Gen. 18-19. Compare how Lot and Abraham treat strangers.
- In what ways are you and your family hospitable? What customs do you have for receiving guests?
- Do you think there is still a duty today to give be hospitable to strangers? Why yes/no?
- Do you think there are people today who are in need of hospitality? Why yes/no?

Abraham's *chutzpah*

- How would you describe Abraham's manner? Arrogant, humble,...?
- Describe Abraham's plea in your own words. What does he want G-d to agree with?
- Right or wrong. Abraham proposes a compromise to G-d..
- Abraham reminds G-d that a plan to punish the guilty can also punish the innocent. Can you associate this with contemporary events or phenomena?
- G-d changes his plan through Abraham's intervention. Do you change your mind easily?

Our environment

- Do you think you sometimes find yourself in a culture (environment) that does not protect the poor, weak, or vulnerable? Why do/don't you?
- To what extent do environmental factors determine our behavior? In other words, which is more important: personality or environmental factors?

The evil of Sodom and Gomorra

- Try to summarize the three passages as precisely as possible. How do they describe the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah ?
- Do you think the things the three passages describe still occur today?
- What could be another contemporary sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?



Figure 1.3
The Video Clip

1.4 TZADIKIM

This section is **in-depth study material**.

1.4.1 GENERAL

Justice is not just an abstract concept. It must be concretely practiced. According to Jewish folktales, at any given time there are 36 - *lamed vav* - people who excel in it. These 36 are characterized by their absolute righteousness. Therefore, they are also known as **the 36 righteous - lamed vav tzadikim**. They are righteous, humble, often poor, unknown, and their status as righteous is hidden because they live in poverty and ignorance. The *tzadikim* are righteous solely for the sake of righteousness, not for the sake of fame or reward.

The *tzadikim*, according according to these folktales, return from their hiddenness to save people, or a nation, from destruction. Afterwards, they disappear back into anonymity. Therefore, they are also known as the hidden righteous - *tzadikim nistarim*. They are usually unaware of their special status. A person who claims to be one of the 36 is by definition not a *tzadik* a righteous person is humble, and would never label himself a righteous person. A *tzadik* would simply never see itself as a *tzadik*. Should a righteous person be accidentally discovered, his identity must still remain secret. Indeed, the sin of hubris is always lurking. Every Jew, according to this folk tale, should live as if he or she were one of the righteous. That means living an ethical and humble life.

Tzadikim have an absolute role: the existence of the world rests on their shoulders. They bear all the miseries and worries of the world. According to these stories, G-d decides not to destroy the world as long as 36 righteous people still exist. When a hidden righteous person dies, a new one takes his place takes his place. If G-d fails to find someone to take the place, the world ceases to exist. In that case the existence of the world can no longer be justified.

This belief has its origins in two Talmudic fragments. These two sources, when combined, lead to the idea that the world is maintained by 36 righteous people. The combination was possibly derived from the fact that “saluting the Divine Presence” originally had a strong association with the Temple service in Jerusalem. That Temple service was considered the thing that sustained the world. (Pirkei Avot: 1:2).

**1.4.2 SANHEDRIN
97B:11; SUKKAH
45B:6**

The world has no fewer than thirty-six righteous people in each generation who greet the Divine Presence.

1.4.3 CHULLIN 92A:1

The verse states: "A omer of barley, and a half-omer of barley." A omer equals thirty se'a, and a half-omer equals fifteen se'a, totaling forty-five se'a; these are the forty-five righteous individuals in whose merit the world continues to exist.

**1.4.4 DIDACTIC
SUGGESTIONS**

ASSIGNMENT. Create with the students a *mindmap* of examples of righteous behavior. The students can reflect on what justice means to them.

ASSIGNMENT. Students can reflect on their own experience with the kindness of others. Do students think they have ever encountered a *tzadik nistar*?

ASSIGNMENT. Together with the students, think about (historical) examples of possible *tzadikim nistarim*.



Figure 1.4
Source: © Sergign /
Adobe Stock

1.5 BACK IN TIME

This section is **in-depth study material**.

1.5.1 GENERAL

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah takes place in a world that is very different from ours. Therefore, to understand the story, it is also important to keep in mind the world in which it takes place. After all, the world we live in always influences our thoughts and behavior. The same applies for the Torah characters Abraham and Lot. We will not understand them fully without looking at the world in which they lived.

The world of the Hebrew Bible is about 3,000 years older than ours. This time difference also brings other differences. The world of the Hebrew Bible is ancient, agricultural, communal, and considers old age a blessing. The world today is modern, industrial, individualistic, and considers youth a blessing.

Biblical Jews often lived in harsh, rural areas, with local towns or small villages. The society was agrarian. The people cultivated wheat and barley. They used flax to make linen. They grew fig and olive trees and had vineyards. They cultivated the land, and were depended on it. The people of ancient Israel lived much more according to the rhythms of nature. They were depended on temperature, rainfall, and soil quality. In other words, the economy was a subsistence economy. Later, fishing, handicrafts, and trade became more common. Professions such as blacksmith, basket maker, potter, etc. came into existence over time.

1.5.2 HOSPITALITY

In the ancient Near East, travel was an integral part of the people's existence. The ancient Israelites lived largely a nomadic existence, in a harsh wilderness. Within this context there was a need for protocols, rules of conduct, which neutralized the dangers of this existence to some extent. On the one hand, the traveler was dependent on the good will and hospitality of others to obtain resting places and food. On the other hand, the host needed a way to neutralize the potential danger of the unknown traveler. Moreover, it was important for the host to maintain rules of conduct that would also protect him or her during future trips. A hospitable welcome allowed the guest to survive, and the host neutralized the unknown, and thus potentially dangerous, by adopting the stranger as a temporary member of the community.

Hospitality emerged as a social system to enable a nomadic existence in an inhospitable landscape! From this context, hospitality developed into a Jewish virtue.

Only the father had the authority to provide hospitality. An important ritual within hospitality was the washing of the feet. Washing signaled the transition from stranger to guest. After successful probation, the guest turned into a friend, and was presented as such to the village. In the case of unsuccessful probation, the guest met a grim fate with banishment or killing. After the stay, which was not to last too long, the guest left, blessing the host and his household. Sometimes guests decided to stay within the community. They were then known as ger, as a foreigner with a residence permit. They were protected, but did not have the right to offer hospitality themselves.

1.5.3 DIDACTIC SUGGESTIONS

The students can carry out the following assignments.

ASSIGNMENT. Read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in conjunction with the above text on the ancient Near East. What historical elements recur in the story? What elements of hospitality as a social phenomenon do they recognize?

ASSIGNMENT. Answer the following questions.

- In your opinion, does the Torah paint a historically accurate picture of the world of the ancient Near East? Why yes/no?
- Do you think it's important that the Torah gives a historically accurate picture? Or is it more about the "life lessons" it gives?

1.6 GLOSSARY

Chutzpah

The word *chutzpah* is difficult to define. The meaning of this noun lies somewhere between the more extreme ‘insolence’ and the more moderate ‘impropriety’. Thus, someone with *chutzpah* is unafraid to do rather ‘daring’ things. This is also how we can describe Abraham’s intervention.

The word comes from Yiddish, and the Yiddish word in turn comes from Hebrew. In Yiddish it tends to have a negative connotation, such as ‘rudeness’ or ‘arrogance’, but this is not necessarily the case in the other languages! Within Judaism, *chutzpah* has the meaning of a critical but sincere discussion between the two partners of the covenant: G-d and a Jew. The Jew cries out to G-d, against G-d, and in the name of G-d’s creation and covenant.

In addition to Abraham, Moses also forms an example. In Exodus 32:11, Moses is at Mount Sinai when G-d informs him that the Jewish people at the bottom of the mountain are worshipping a calf. This goes against one of the Ten Commandments, so the Lord wants to destroy them all and start over with Moses. Moses thereupon enters into a discussion with the Lord, just as Abraham does in Genesis 18, and the Lord deviates from His plan. So Moses and Abraham both got *chutzpah!*

Righteousness

Righteousness has several meanings. First, justice is a legal concept. Whatever is in accordance with the law is just. Second, justice is also a moral concept. To act justly is to act ‘rightly’, in accordance with what is ‘good’ or ‘correct’. Justice also takes practice: no one naturally does the right or good thing all the time. We encounter this idea often in the Tanakh!

1.7. TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT CLASSROOM DAY

The scene opens on a classroom. The final school bell rings. The kids start to pack up.

Teacher: Before you go home, there is one more thing. As you know, there was a fire in one of our city's apartment complexes. The school has decided to organize a donation campaign to help out the poor families that lived there. Try bringing in some old clothes and other things you can miss for next Monday! I'm sure those families will appreciate that very much!

Aaron (mumbles to himself): I'm sure they would.

The kids take their school bags and walk outside.

2 INT COMPUTER DAY

We see Aaron sitting in front of his computer. He gets a videocall from his friend Levi. He accepts it and a video-screen call opens up.

Levi: Hey! What's up?

Aaron: Hey, I'm good, what about you?

Levi: I'm good, actually. Have you already found some stuff to donate?

Aaron: Nope, and I'm not really planning on donating anything.

Levi: Why not? You know they lost their house and a lot of their stuff, right?

Aaron: It's not really their house, though, is it? We just let them live there free of charge.

Aaron: They're not in actual need, Aaron. I heard my parents talking about them the other day. The people that lived in those apartments are economic immigrants. They're here for cheap housing and a bigger paycheck, without contributing anything themselves. It's almost like stealing. And now I even have to give them my stuff too? I don't think so. Why don't they just go back to where they came from?

Levi: Wow man, don't you think that's a bit harsh? If people are in need, it's our duty as Jews to be just and help them.

Aaron: Not necessarily. And I don't need to talk to them personally to know them. You can see how they are on the street, they're just mean people. There's a story in the Torah that's literally about this. And in that case Hashem

destroyed the bad people. It's the story of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Levi: I know that one! From the Book of Genesis, right? But doesn't it -

Suddenly a mysterious message appears on screen. It says: SODOM AND GOMORRA: A STORY. There's an accept and decline option. Aaron and Levi are both surprised.

Levi: What's that?

Aaron: I don't know... It says it's an invitation for the story of Sodom and Gomorrah... We were just talking about this! That's spooky...

Levi: Computers are really advanced nowadays. Do you think we should accept it?

Aaron: Sure, why not?

Aaron and Levi both click on 'accept'. The screen explodes into a kaleidoscope. A voice-over welcomes them to the story. Both of them are rather surprised.

Voice-over: Dear virtual travelers! Welcome to the Tanakh: internet edition! You have chosen the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Strap in!

Aaron: But how did it know -

3 EXT SODOM EVENING

The screen abruptly transforms into a virtual reality. The scene opens up on the city of Sodom. We see an older looking man sitting near the city gate.

Voice-over: Word came to Hashem that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were doing evil things. To see if this was true, He sent two angels. "That evening the two angels arrived in Sodom, while Lot was sitting near the city gate. When Lot saw them, he got up, bowed down low, and said, "Gentlemen, I am your servant. Please come to my home."

Levi: That's Lot, Abraham's nephew!

4 EXT LOT'S HOUSE NIGHT

Lot, together with his wife and two daughters are sitting inside the house when a mob of angry men comes knocking on their door.

Aaron: I guess those are the people of Sodom...

Voice-over: The people of Sodom yelled: "Where are you visitors? Send them out, so we can know them!" Lot was so afraid that they might hurt his visitors, that he even offered his two daughters instead. "I'll bring them out, and you can do what you want with them. But don't harm these men. They are guests in my home." But the mob didn't care. "Don't get in our way," the crowd answered. "You're an outsider. What right do you have to order us around? We'll do worse things to you than we're going to do to them."

Levi: I didn't remember this story being so violent...

Voice-over: "But the two angels in the house reached out and pulled Lot safely inside. Then they struck everyone in the crowd blind, and none of them could even find the door. The two angels said to Lot, "The Lord has heard many terrible things about the people of Sodom, and he has sent us here to destroy the city. Take your family and leave." So Lot decided to escape to a small, nearby village.

5 EXT SODOM DAY

We see Lot and his family quickly leaving the city.

Voice-over: The sun was coming up as Lot reached the town of Zoar, and the Lord sent sulfur and fire down like rain on Sodom and Gomorrah.

During this narration, fire starts pouring down, until the entire city is engulfed in flames. After an explosion both Aaron and Levi are left looking at a black screen.

Aaron: So, the story just concludes like that? I'm a bit confused now.

Voice-over: Can I ask you a question?

Aaron: Oh... Um, yeah, sure?

Voice-over: What exactly was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?

Aaron: I dunno... Unkindness? Violence?

Voice-over: Those are good suggestions. Different people have understood the story in different ways. Some think the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was inhospitality, or cruelty to keep foreigners away, or mistreatment of the poor, injustice, selfishness, Do any of these things sound familiar?

Aaron: Wait, what do you mean? Am I doing those things?

The voice-over remains silent.

Aaron: I don't know, maybe I need to rethink all of this... Who are you, if I may ask?

Voice-over: Oh, I'm just the story, asking you this question.

The virtual-reality screen abruptly closes. Levi and Aaron return to their videocall.

Levi: So, uhhhh...

Aaron: You don't need to say anything. Can we meet up? I think I have an idea.

5 INT CLASS ROOM DAY

It's raining heavily outside. Aaron and Levi are sitting in class next to each other. At the front of the class room there are a lot of boxes stacked on top of each other.

Teacher: Thank you everyone for donating so much stuff! And a special shout out to Aaron and Levi, who really pulled their weight on this one! I'm sure those poor families will appreciate this very much.

Aaron (mumbling to himself, sincerely): I hope they do.

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