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D'VAR TORAH Vayera Justice and Charity

My Rosh Hayeshiva from Mercaz Harav, Rav Shaul Yisraeli, identifies Avraham's commitment to transmitting the values of charity and justice as the core principles of Judaism. Taken together, justice and charity are the totality of Judaism.

A just society demonstrates fidelity to law and provides protection and security for its citizens. A commitment to justice assures consistency and fairness, and informs leaders' decisions and governments' policies.

However, justice cannot stand alone. Sometimes, a society's perspective of justice is merely a veneer for persecution and prejudice. Even Sodom followed a legal system, and yet its citizens engaged in corrupt and deviant practices. Some systems of justice can be unlawful and unethical under the guise of being normal and democratic.

For a society to thrive, charity and kindness must be woven into the fabric of the culture. Kindness, sensitivity and empathy mitigate and moderate justice and nudge law to be thoughtful and judicious.

But just as a legal system cannot be the only pillar of society, we must be concerned about a culture which manifests excessive kindness and consideration. Limits must be defined so that corruption and evil can be prosecuted and prevented.

Even Abraham drew a red line when praying for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, ending his pleas for mercy upon recognizing that the cities lacked even ten righteous people.

As we study Avraham's commitment to justice and compassion we should take inspiration from him and remain resolute to find such balance in all of our engagements and relationships.