

# Who Sits in the Gate

*On election day the Levites' song for Tuesday is Psalm 82, and this week's parsha puts Lot in the gate of Sodom. A note on choosing leaders, and on the one day every citizen is the judge.*

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Jerusalem · Tuesday 27 October 2026 / 16 Cheshvan 5787

This morning, before voting opened, shuls across Israel said the song for the third day of the week. In the Mishnah's list of the songs the Levites sang in the Mikdash, Tuesday's is Psalm 82: "G-d stands in the divine assembly, pronouncing judgment among the divine beings" (Tehillim 82:1; Mishnah Tamid 7:4). Rashi reads it plainly. G-d stands among the judges "to see whether they judge fairly" (Rashi on Tehillim 82:1).

On the day we pick the people who will sit in the Knesset, the psalm opens with a reminder. There's another Judge in the room, and He's watching the judges.

It doesn't flatter them, either. "How long will you judge perversely, showing favor to the wicked?" (82:2). Then it gives the job description: "Judge the wretched and the orphan, vindicate the lowly and the poor" (82:3). And it ends with a line every candidate should tape to the mirror: "I had taken you for divine beings, attendants of the Most High, all of you; but you shall die as mortals do, fall like any prince" (82:6–7). Power is on loan.

Now open this week's parsha, Vayeira.

The angels reach Sodom in the evening, "as Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom" (Bereishit 19:1). The gate was where a city's elders sat and judged. Rashi notes that the word for "sitting" is written without a vav, so it can be read "he sat," and he quotes the Midrash: "that day they had appointed him as their judge" (Rashi on Bereishit 19:1, from Bereishit Rabbah 50:3).

Lot learned hospitality in Avraham's house, Rashi says, and he took the strangers in. But a seat in the gate couldn't hold back the mob at his door, "young and old, the whole entire body" (19:4). When he warned his own sons-in-law, "he seemed to his sons-in-law as one who jests" (19:14). And at dawn, with the end coming, "still he delayed. So the agents seized his hand" (19:16).

First lesson for today: a good man in office isn't enough when the city around him has stopped caring. And a citizen who drags his feet on the day it counts may need someone to grab his hand. Consider this your hand being grabbed. Go vote.

The second moment comes two chapters later. Sarah sees trouble for Yitzchak's future and tells Avraham to send Hagar and Yishmael away. "The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his" (21:11). G-d answers him: "whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says" (21:12), literally "listen to her voice," shema b'kolah. Rashi draws a surprising conclusion: Avraham was secondary to Sarah in prophecy (Rashi on Bereishit 21:12).

The Rambam and the Bartenura both count this episode among Avraham's ten trials (commentaries on Avot 5:3). The trial wasn't only obedience to G-d. It was listening to a voice in his own home that saw further down the road than he did, even when it hurt.

Most of us have a voice like that we'd rather not hear. Maybe it's the neighbor who votes differently, or a soldier's mother. Choosing leaders well starts with listening before you pick up the slip.

The third moment is the last trial. "Some time afterward, G-d put Abraham to the test" (22:1). The Mishnah says Avraham was tried with ten trials and withstood them all (Avot 5:3), and both the Rambam and the Bartenura count the Akeidah as the tenth. When G-d calls, Avraham answers with one word, hineni, "Here I am." Rashi: "Such is the answer of the pious: it is an expression of meekness and readiness" (Rashi on Bereishit 22:1).

The trial ends with a blessing, and it promises that "your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes" (22:17). The parsha that opened with Lot sitting in the gate of a corrupt city closes with Avraham's children holding the gate.

Between those two gates stands today. We don't sit in the gate as judges for life. We get one day, and one slip of paper. For that one day each of us is a little like Lot, appointed judge "that day." Avraham would have treated it as a test.

So here's my ask, whoever you vote for. Answer like Avraham: hineni, with humility and readiness. Listen to the voice you've been avoiding. Don't make the angels drag you out of the house. And when the results come in tonight, remember the last verse of this morning's psalm: "Arise, O G-d, judge the earth" (82:8). The people we elect will sit in the gate. He still stands over it.

Where I come from in Pittsburgh, you show up for your shift whether you feel like it or not. Today is a shift. Show up.

I encourage all eligible voters to vote.

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