



Perceptions • Marcheshvan 17, 5786 • November 8, 2025 • Issue #2121

THE PEOPLE of Sdom were bad. Nineveh at least got a second chance. The people of Sdom were just nuked.

And yet, Avraham Avinu defended them. He tried to save them when most of us would have just prayed for their demise, or make it happen ourselves. Even had there been fifty *tzaddikim* there, there were thousands of evil people all around them. And besides, what would the chances be of righteous people living in such an evil place?

The GR”A speaks about four different categories of Jews, and which ones will be saved at the time of the redemption. There are the *talmidei chachamim*, those who keep Torah and respect *talmidei chachamim*, those who are weak in both but identify with the Jewish People, and the Erev Rav, basically those who not only despise Torah and those who adhere to it, but they hate all things Jewish and fight against them.

The *talmidei chachamim* can be saved in their own right. Those who respect them and help them out whenever they can will be saved in that merit. The third group will be included in the redemption by virtue of their continued association with the Jewish People, while the Erev Rav will have to go.

But the GR”A adds you have to pray for the evil to do *teshuvah*. We say in *Selichos* that God prefers that the evil do *teshuvah* rather than punish or destroy them, so that should be our cue to pray for their *teshuvah*. You never know.

In fact, there is a story in the Gemora that makes this point (*Brochos* 10a). There was a rebellious Jew living in Rebi Meir’s neighborhood who caused him no end of consternation. Finally, Rebi Meir decided to pray for his demise, which probably would have worked.

But his wife, the famous Bruria pointed out to him that God only wanted sins to end, not the sinners. So, instead, Rebi Meir prayed that his annoying neighbor did *teshuvah*, and he did! And everyone lived Jewishly happily ever after.

It’s a hard one, especially today, as there are so many anti-Torah Jews, some of whom are prepared to go to “evil” lengths to get their way. It’s also a confusing one today as well, because so many people who are anti-Torah and who might even look Erev Rav-ish could end up doing *teshuvah*. It hasn’t happened often in Jewish history, but it has happened.

Take Menashe HaMelech (Chizkiah’s son), for example. He undid all of his father’s righteous work and turned the country to idol worship for twenty-two years. But then God sent the king of Assyria to capture and imprison him, which “inspired” him to return to God, which he did for the rest of his life.

It is pointed out that had the idol-worshipping and idol-selling Terach been knocked off by God there would have been no Avraham and, eventually, the Jewish People. Not only did Terach father the future father of the Jewish People, but Terach himself did *teshuvah* before he died. Whatever he had left to fix up was later taken care of through the suffering of the righteous Iyov into whom Terach had reincarnated.

Granted, there are times when extreme measures must be taken, like when Pinchas killed Zimri at the end of *Parashas Balak*. But that was strictly according to the *halachah*, and without any personal malice, as God explained. How many people today can work like that?

The take away is that even if our hatred of other Jews seems justified, maybe even halachically inspired, we're expected by God to find it within us to pray for their *teshuvah* instead. "Hate the sin, not the sinner" is the motto, as difficult as it might be to separate one from the other. Some people seem to revel in their sinning.

Even though Avraham walked away from bargaining the fate of Sdom when he reached ten righteous people, it doesn't mean he threw in the towel. If anyone had reason to hate the people of Sdom and pray for their destruction, it was Avraham Avinu. And yet, he found it within himself to take on their case and defend them to the end against God, of all Prosecutors.

Why about us, and the Jewish "Sdomites" that we have to deal with?

Chanukah is fast approaching, and there are two books you should consider to greatly enhance your holiday and the 24 days before it: *The Light of Thirty-Six*, *Chanukah Lite*, and *Twenty-Four Days*, all available through Amazon. It can take two weeks to receive them, so order now. PDF versions are available through the thirtysix.org Store.

Good Shabbos
Pinchas Winston