

## Avraham came forward and said, “Will you also stamp out the righteous along with the wicked?” (18:23)

Unlike his predecessor, Noach, Avraham *Avinu* prayed for the wicked people of his generation. The Torah makes a point of relating the Patriarch’s dialogue with Hashem to spare the city of Sodom. This was a community inhabited primarily by evil degenerates whose narcissistic desires towered over any sense of humanity they might have had. They were totally evil. Yet, Avraham prayed for them. Likewise, Moshe *Rabbeinu* prayed on behalf of those Jews who had sinned with the *eigel ha’zahav*, Golden Calf. The prayer was for the sinners to repent and the sins to be forgiven. This is the area in which Avraham and Moshe distinguished themselves over Noach. Was Noach wrong in not praying for his generation? Apparently, *Chazal* question characterizing him as a *tzadik*, righteous person, had he lived during Avraham’s generation. Something was missing in his spiritual responsibility towards his fellowman. Why did he not pray for them? Prayer works. He might have been able to counteract the decree. Why did he not try?

In his *Be’er Moshe*, the **Ozrover Rebbe, zl**, defends Noach’s actions, citing the **Kedushas Levi** who writes: “Noach was also a righteous, wholesome person, but he was unaware of his sublime spiritual plateau. Noach viewed himself as being nothing more than a simple person. He did not believe himself capable of countermanding Hashem’s decree. Noach figured that he was no more meritorious than the people of his generation. Therefore, if he was spared, they would also be spared. Thus, he did not feel compelled to pray on their behalf.”

This way, Noach did not enter the Ark until the very last moment when the floodwaters were rising. *Chazal* refer to him as being *mi’ketanei emunah*, “those of limited /small faith.” The Ozrover explains that in his outstanding humility, Noach did not consider himself worthy of being saved. Why was he any different from the people of his generation? It was only after the waters were up to his throat that he realized that his place was in the Ark, and that, indeed, he was different.

We derive from here that it is essential that one prays that evil be eradicated and that the sinners repent. One should not pray that a sinner die. He is not G-d. The Almighty determines who lives and who perishes. Man should pray that the sinner receive a wake-up call that will motivate his return to observance. How many righteous Jews were descendants of evil people? If Terach, the idol worshipper, would have died, our Patriarch, Avraham, would not have been born. We never know who actually has a *z’chus*, hidden merit, that makes him worthy of being the progenitor of a righteous descendant. Thus, we pray for all Jews, regardless of their beliefs or disbeliefs. If they are Jewish – we pray for them.

*Ish L’rei’ayhu* relates that **Horav Shlomo Zalman Liphshutz, zl**, author of the *Chemdas Shlomo* and *Rav* of the great city of Warsaw, had many detractors. There were secular Jews who despised anyone who was observant. This was especially true if the *Rav* was distinguished and erudite. These hooligans went out of their way to make life miserable for the *Rav* of Warsaw. He was once

walking through the street when a few of them threw garbage on his head. When the members of the observant community became aware of this affront to the *Rav's kavod*, dignity, they became outraged. How dare these vacuous misfits denigrate their *Rav*!

*Rav* Liphshutz calmed down those who were about to take matters into their own hands in defense of his honor. He told them to go home. Everything would work itself out. He returned home and withdrew to his study. Shortly thereafter, his wife heard him weeping. She entered the room and asked her husband, "Is it worth working yourself up over such low people? Why should you cry over such contemptible individuals?" The *Chemdas Shlomo* replied, "I am not crying over what they did to me. I am entreating Hashem not to punish them because of me. Why should another Jew suffer because of me?"

Likewise, **Horav Yechiel Michel, zl, m'Zlotchav** enjoined his children always to pray on behalf of their enemies, that they be blessed with success and only good. This is a service to Hashem that is even greater than prayer itself.

We have no idea how far-reaching *tefillah*, sincere prayer, can go, and the long-term effects it can have. One morning, an American Jew living in a major metropolis received the dreaded phone call that he knew would come one day. The administrator of the Jewish nursing home in London where his elderly mother was a patient, called to notify him that his mother had passed away during the night. The son reacted as any loving son would react, immediately reciting the blessing, *Baruch Dayan Ha'Emes*, Blessed is the Truthful Judge, and then broke down in tears. His mother had reached an advanced age, and she had been quite ill. The news did not come as a surprise, but a mother is a mother. Reaching London in a timely fashion was impossible. Could the local *Chevra Kadisha*, Jewish Burial Society, see to his mother's funeral? They agreed, and the son prepared to sit *shivah*, observe the seven day mourning period, at home.

Two days later, he was shocked to receive a call from none other than his mother – alive and well! She was fine, and leaving this world prematurely was the farthest thing from her mind. Her son immediately contacted the nursing home, where he discovered that apparently there had been a terrible mistake. Somehow, it was his mother's roommate who had died. One can only imagine the administrator's feelings of trepidation when they had to notify the son of the other woman who had passed away. It was thus shocking to hear the "other" son declare, "Good! Make sure that you cremate her body as soon as possible!" When the administrator told him that, "alas," they had already buried his mother by mistake, he was overcome with angry emotion, and declared, "Well, my mother won out. She got her way after all!"

The administrator felt that he had to get to the bottom of this story. After some research, he discovered that many years earlier, the son had had a falling out with his mother, followed by his complete break with Judaism. He became a virulent apostate with an animus towards religion and his mother. Clearly, the man was unhinged. He demonstrated his lunacy when, every time that he visited, he would yell at his mother and say, "When you die, I will see to it that you are not buried in

a Jewish cemetery, but cremated.”

This disturbed man’s mother was herself a righteous, observant woman who prayed fervently everyday of her life. As the end drew near, she would constantly supplicate the Almighty that somehow she would merit burial in a *kever Yisrael*, Jewish cemetery. Her tears flowed over the spiritual demise of her son and the consequent missed opportunity for her to be buried among Jews. Her prayers intensified when she heard her son’s plans to have her cremated – a procedure that is prohibited by Jewish law, a method reserved for and utilized by our most rabid enemies to dispose of a Jewish corpse.

Our Father in Heaven had other plans – plans that did not coincide with those of her lunatic son. What appeared to be an error by an administrator was actually part of Hashem’s Divine Plan that this righteous woman be buried in a Jewish cemetery, as per her wish. This is the power of *tefillah*.

A mother’s tears have special value, their sincerity unquestionable. *Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita*, would often visit the **Tchebiner Rav, zl**, and share his novella with the sage. One time, *Rav Shternbuch* related an unusually brilliant *dvar Torah*. The *Chebiner Rav* enjoyed it very much, commenting, “The *chiddush* is not yours!” *Rav Shternbuch* was frightened. “Why does the *Rav* think that it is not my *chiddush*?” *Rav Shternbuch* asked. “Does the *Rav* think that I, *chas v’shalom*, Heaven forbid, ‘borrowed’ it from another source?”

The *Tchebiner Rav* chuckled as he explained the reason for his strange remark: “Such a brilliant *chiddush* could only be the result of a mother’s tears. For you to have rendered such an incredible *chiddush*, your mother must have prayed incessantly and with great intensity that she be worthy of such a son!”