

What if there should be fifty righteous people in the midst of the city? (18:24)

If there had been *tzaddikim*, would they have made a difference? In reality, there were not even ten righteous people. If there would have been ten *tzaddikim*, however, the city would have been saved. Why? Will a few *tzaddikim* accomplish so much that their presence would save the city from disaster? The answer is yes, if these few righteous Jews do not isolate themselves from the community. The key phrase is, "*b'soch ha'ir*," in the midst of the city. The fact that *tzaddikim* live in a community is not necessarily a guarantee that it will be spared. Hashem does not overlook sins, simply forgive iniquity, just because the city is host to a number of righteous, G-d fearing Jews. They must be involved in the community, living "in the midst of the city," giving *shiurim*, lectures, publicly displaying their conviction in the Almighty in order for their presence to have an effect. When the wicked see the righteous observing *mitzvos*, performing acts of *chesed*, reaching out to the unaffiliated, acting in a manner becoming a *Torah* Jew - they change. They can only put us down if we allow them to. The light of *Torah* can banish the darkest darkness. We have only to focus on the light.

Avraham *Avinu* 's advocacy on behalf of the evil Sodomites is remarkable and, indeed, sets the standard for the patience we must exert in order to give the sinner an opportunity to repent. *Horav Moshe Schwab*, *zl*, cites *Sforno* who interprets Hashem's statement regarding the fifty *tzaddikim* who would catalyze Sodom's rescue, "*If I find in Sodom fifty righteous men who will protest against the wicked ones.*" We infer from here that as long as someone protests, as long as there is one who will rebuke and attempt to set the wicked on the correct path, there is hope. If someone protests, the *rasha* has the possibility of hearing *mussar*. All is not yet lost.

Thus, on the one hand, we must vigorously challenge those who would defame the *Torah* and its way of life. On the other hand, however, if someone has a *Yiddishe neshamah*, such that when he is up against the wall he cries out, "*Shma Yisrael*," we are not permitted to "write him off" the spiritual ledger. If Hashem does not, how can we?