

"And Hashem said, "Because the outcry of Sodom and Amorah has become great and because their sin has been very grave." (18:20)

The sin of Sodom is viewed as the standard of evil. The people exemplify iniquity in its most depraved form. The manner in which the Sodomite acted represents a character trait which *Chazal* term as *middas Sodom*; it has its own unique element of evil. Let us focus on their sin and attempt to come to terms with the question, "What was so terrible about the sins of Sodom that has rendered its citizens the eternal symbols of corruption?"

The *Navi Yechezkel* says, regarding the sin of Sodom (*Yechezkel 16:49*), "*Behold this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of bread and abundance of idleness, and yet she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.*" They did not give charity to the poor and needy. Remarkable! Undoubtedly, refraining from contributing to charity, turning one's head and heart away from the plight of the unfortunate is reprehensible, but is this the ultimate sin? The people of Sodom were infamous for travesties much more serious than a lack of compassion. Yet, the *Navi* does not indicate that those misdeeds warranted eternal castigation; it was their lack of human sensitivity, their emphatic refusal to help others. Is refusing to sustain another Jew reason for such condemnation?

Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl, posits that in reality what might be viewed by us as a human failing is much more - it is tantamount to murder! While we may define stealing as taking that which is not ours, it may lead to much more than that. When one witnesses someone literally starving, we might say that although he is not a charitable or fine person, this lack of sensitivity does not affect the person's integrity or decency.

This idea is valid only when the act of charity falls into the category of voluntary contribution, when lives are not at stake. If an individual is literally starving before our eyes, if his financial situation has declined to the point that he has no food, the one who stands by idly disregarding the pleas of his destitute brother is nothing less than a murderer! Are we the ones to determine our neighbor's financial circumstances? Are we the ones who will pass judgment upon his life? Can we continue to ignore the poor when we take into consideration the possible result of our disregard? In Sodom, lives were at stake. People had nothing to eat. Yet, those who were able to help ignored their fellow man. They were punished accordingly.