

# TO BE ALONE

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Most commentators dwell upon the compassion for sinners demonstrated by our father Avraham in this week's parsha. Though this message is undoubtedly the important one, as relating to the tragedy of Sodom, there is an important peripheral lesson, of perhaps equal importance, involved there as well. And that lesson is that a few good people make all the difference in human society and in the fate of mankind.

Sodom is not destroyed because of the thousands or even millions of evildoers in its midst. It was destroyed simply because it lacked ten good people in its society. And this is God's message to Avraham as well. Avraham is a lonely person - he is on one side and everyone else in the world is seemingly on the other side.

Lonely people oftentimes are beset by doubts as to their course in life. "Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong!" But history has shown us time and again that the lonely individual is proven correct and the behavior and opinions of the many are proven to be wrong and even dangerous. Avraham becomes the paradigm for the lonely righteous in a world that envies, imitates and glorifies Sodom. He is the father of the Jewish people especially in this regard.

The Jews are a small and lonely group in our world. Their values and way of life are in opposition to those of the many. Yet even our enemies admit - and in fact object to the prevalence of our contributions, influence and vitality as regards human civilization and history.

The destruction of Sodom leaves a deep imprint on Avraham. It helps shape his attitude towards his son Yitzchak. He eschews the choice of the many - of Yishmael and the children of Keturah - in favor of the lonely good and pious son Yitzchak. That is perhaps the message of God to Avraham when He told him: "For through Yitzchak [alone] will you have true descendants."

One Yitzchak eventually is able to counter - in God's inscrutable reckoning of merits and salvation millions of evildoers - no matter how well pedigreed those evildoers claim to be. Sodom eventually is destroyed by its own innate lack of goodness and of a dearth of pious citizens. But Avraham and Yitzchak, small in numbers and opposed by most of the world, will continue to flourish and proclaim the values of goodness and righteousness in the general world.

The prophet Yeshayahu characterizes Avraham as "echad" - one, unique, alone, singular. That description is to be interpreted positively and not as a complaint or source of weakness or pessimism. In a world of the many it is the few that really matter. The Lord told us long ago in the

book of Dvarim that we would be the fewest of all people. Yet in our influence and strength of spirit we are as numerous as are the stars in heaven.

This inner realization of ourselves and our role in God's plan for human existence and growth marks us as the true children of Avraham and gives us hope even in a world where Sodom appears all powerful.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)