

Rav Kook Torah



by Rabbi Chanan Morrison -
www.ravkooktorah.com

Combating Evil

Summary: To combat S'dom, it was not enough to reject their philosophy. It was necessary to present a blueprint for a society guided by kindness and generosity.

A careful reading of the Torah's account clearly indicates that Lot did not deserve to be saved on his own merits alone:

When God destroyed the cities of the plain, God remembered Avraham; and He sent out Lot from the upheaval when He overturned the cities in which Lot lived. (B'reishit 19:29)

Why was Lot not rescued on the basis of his own merits? He certainly did not participate in the infamous S'domite cruelty towards visitors. Why was he allowed to escape only because 'God remembered Avraham'?

Challenging S'dom

The need for God to destroy S'dom shows the importance of chesed (kindness) in our world. It demonstrated the extent of ruin that results from a society lacking this critical trait.

In any ideological conflict, opposition to a particular position can take one of two forms. Some people may reject a position on the basis of its expected consequences. But if they only denounce and point out its negative aspects, they are only partially confronting the objectionable position. True opposition is only achieved when we can present a positive alternative that promises to govern society in a better and more just fashion.

The problem with S'dom was not just that the people of S'dom were cruel. Rather, the very fabric of the S'domite society was corrupt, based on their abhorrence of kindness. They based their municipal regulations on an ideology of selfishness and self-interest.

Lot and Avraham

To combat S'dom, it was not enough to merely reject their philosophy. It was necessary to present a comprehensive blueprint for a society guided by the traits of kindness and generosity.

Lot rejected the cruel ways of S'dom. By virtue of his association with Avraham, Lot recognized the importance of chesed. On a private level, he invited strangers and tried to protect them. But Lot was unable to present an alternative vision of society based on kindness.

Avraham, on the other hand, was a different story. His whole life was centered on developing and promoting the ideal of chesed. Avraham established chesed as a fixed and organized trait for both the individual and the community. As God Himself testified, For I have known (Avraham), that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will keep God's ways, doing righteousness and justice. (18:19)

For this reason, Lot did not deserve to be saved from S'dom on his own merits. Unlike his uncle A'raham, he presented no alternative vision, and did not properly contest the S'domite ideology of cruelty.

How to Fight Evil

This is an important lesson for us. Our rejection of ideologies that contradict the Torah's ethical ideals should not be limited to negative criticism. It is insufficient to merely point out the harmful or false aspects of an ill-conceived plan. Rather, we need to open an offensive front by presenting a positive outlook based on true values – just as Avraham and his vision of chesed stood in direct opposition to the S'domites' philosophy of egocentric cruelty.

Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 46-48.

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