

GENESIS 18: 17-32

Then Adonai said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of Adonai by doing what is right and just, so that Adonai will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” Then Adonai said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.” The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before Adonai. Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Adonai said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to Adonai, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?” “If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.” Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?” He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.” Then he said, “May Adonai not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?” He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.” Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to Adonai, what if only twenty can be found there?” He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.” Then he said, “May Adonai not be

angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?" He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."

1. In the opening verses of this section, the biblical narrator takes us inside God's head. God is "talking to God-self," so to speak. It is only with "Then Adonai said," that God actually begins talking to Abraham.
2. Abraham negotiates—this by itself is staggering – Rabbi Azariah taught that Abraham our father stood to request mercy for the Sodomites, what is written there? "Far be it from you to do this thing – to kill the righteous with the evildoer so that [the righteous is like the evildoer] – should not the judge of all the earth do justly?" (Genesis 18:25) Rabbi Acha said: you swore and said that you would not bring a flood ever again – why have you violated your vow?! It is strange! A flood of water you won't bring, but a flood of fire you will bring?! If so, you have not fulfilled your vow. "Does not the judge of all the earth do justice" ... According to R. Levi, the verse means that Abraham said: If you seek to have a world, strict justice cannot be exercised; and if you see strict justice, there will be no world. Do You expect to take hold of the well's rope at both ends? You desire a world and You also desire justice? You can have only one of the two. If you do not relent a little, the world will not endure. (Genesis Rabbah 39:6)
3. Why fifty? Why ten? or A Righteous Minyan Would Have Saved Sodom and Gomorrah

Samson Raphael Hirsch

The fact that a party of righteous men is allowed to exist in a goodless state loses its value with a maximum and minimum size of the party and only has real meaning at a medium size. If the number is imposing,

it is tolerated out of fear. If it is small enough to be negligible, it is tolerated because it is overlooked. Only when it consists of a medium number, where it is neither feared nor overlooked, does its existence, its being ... have full significance. Above this number and below it its significance lessens.

Had there been in the precincts of Sodom and Gemorrah, ten righteous men to be found, God would not have despaired of a better future for all, and would have let them all live for this better future....God shows us no reason for despair...we too must courageously..play our part...and stand up for what is right even if it means being in opposition to the whole of our erring contemporaries....

When is being part of a minority and\or voicing a minority opinion significant? Why?