



כולל רבנים
רבינו צבי אשכנזי

An Initiative of Amsterdam Community Kollel

THIS WEEK IN JEWISH HISTORY

19 Av

- 200 Jews were killed in the massacre of Beziers (A city of southern France, an ancient Gallic fortress), 1209.
- Jews of Mitchenick, Poland were expelled by Russian authorities, 1914.

20 Av

- First printed edition of the Zohar, 1558. This led to an explosion of interest in the study of Kabala.
- Anti-Jewish riots in Zola-Egerszeg, Hungary, 1883.

21 Av

- Yahrzeit of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk, 1918.

22 Av

- A violent earthquake rocked E. Yisrael; the city of Acco was completely destroyed, 501.
- 16 Jews were burned to death in Toledo, Spain, 1488.

23 Av

- Pogrom in Zhitomir, Russia, 1905, cost many Jewish lives.

24 Av

- The Chashmona'im replaced Hellenic law with Jewish law. The day was celebrated as a holiday.
- Chmielnicki, Cossack leader with 300,000 Jews lives on his hands, died, 1675.

25 Av

- Jews expelled from France are invited back by King Louis IX, 1315
- Many Jews of Copenhagen were killed during the British bombardment of the city in 1807.
- The Amsterdam hideout of Anne Frank was discovered by the Nazis, 1944.

ACTIONS MAKE THE MAN

One of the *mitzvos* of this week's parsha relates to an *Ir Hanidachas*. When the majority of a city becomes spiritually corrupt and turn to idol worship, the Torah instructs us to destroy the entire city. Immediately following this command, the Torah tells us: "ונתן לך רחמים ורחמך – He will grant you mercy and He will be merciful to you."

The juxtaposition of these ideas is unusual. What connection is there between the command to destroy the *Ir Hanidachas* and Hashem's promise to grant us mercy? Surely, the destruction of an entire city requires firmness and fortitude. Why, then, are those carrying it out being blessed with the quality of mercy?

The *Or HaChaim* offers a powerful explanation. Hashem created human beings with an innate sense of decency and compassion. Our lifelong mission is to safeguard this capacity for compassion. When a person engages in cruel behaviour, this inborn sensitivity can erode over time, leaving them with less *rachamim* and making them increasingly capable of committing further acts of cruelty.

Therefore, explains the *Or HaChaim*, those who were involved in destroying the *Ir Hanidachas* were blessed with the quality of mercy. The destruction of an entire city could have a damaging effect on their compassionate nature. However, since they are carrying out a Divine command to punish those who had sinned against Hashem, He promised that they would retain their innate sense of kindness and decency, untouched by the destruction they had wrought.

We find a similar idea in another *mitzva* mentioned in this week's parsha: the *mitzva* of *Tzedakah*. The Rambam, in his commentary to *Avos 3:15*, writes that if one person gives one thousand gold coins to a single poor person, while another gives one gold coin to one thousand poor people, the second person achieves a greater improvement to his character. The repeated act of giving strengthens the giver's generosity.

Both *mitzvos* teach us an important lesson in how our actions shape our character. Repeated acts of kindness can strengthen compassion, while even necessary acts of severity can leave their mark. The Torah guides us so that our actions influence us positively.