

In this verse we hear God Himself confirming the efficacy of praying for others. This efficacy is rooted in the concept that we have already encountered in Avraham's plea on behalf of Sodom. God pays heed to the prayer of a צדיק or to the prayer of a community when, as the beautiful Hebrew expression has it, הם משתתפים בצערם של אחרים, they identify with the pain and sorrow of others; God spares the wicked so as to spare the righteous from suffering. This is certainly true here, since גם ענוש לצדיק לא טוב (Mishlei 17:26); it hurts Avraham if, because of him, another man is punished, even if that man is deserving of punishment.