

PARSHAS MISHPATIM

by Gedalia Litke

We are instructed to vigorously assist ('azov ta'azov imo') someone struggling to overcome his burdens, even if we intensely dislike the person requiring assistance. (23:5)

Onkeles understands 'azov' in its usual sense of leaving something alone or leaving something behind - in this case we are to leave our dislike of the person behind and help him anyway. Rashi, however, states that in this instance the word 'azov' is to be translated literally as 'assist'. If the pasuk means 'assist' why does it express itself as 'azov' /leave, which has almost the opposite connotation?

Parshas B'reishis (2:24) describes the process of a man taking leave ('ya'azov') of his parents and then getting married and establishing his own family. This implies that, prior to marrying, a man must gain independence by separating from his parents. The ya'azov/leave of this pasuk means that he establishes his independence.

There are different levels of motivation one can have in seeking to assist another person. One level of motive for assisting another may be so as to have the recipient beholden; I gave him something in his time of need and now he owes me, or, more profoundly, I have something over him. A higher motive or reason for assisting another is to enable him to gain or re-gain his independence so that he is in fact no longer dependent upon me or other donors. In the case of someone I dislike, my initial reaction to his need for assistance - if I am going to assist him at all - is likely to be the crasser motive of wanting to have him beholden to me.

Rashi in Mishpatim understands 'azov' /leave the person in need the same way as the pasuk in B'reishis, in the sense of giving independence to the person in need.

Certainly the Torah always wants me to assist others for the higher motivation or reason. In typical situations the Torah leaves it to me to conclude that I should strive for the higher motive. However, when confronted with a situation of helping someone I dislike, the pasuk goes out of its way to make sure I motivate myself to assist in such a way as to help the person achieve independence - 'azov ta'azov imo', help him become independent of need.

[[The above is based primarily on my understanding of a shiur given by HoRav Yochanan Zweig, Shlita.