

# TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*"If there will among you a needy person from one of your brothers within any of your gates, in the land which Hashem your G-d is giving you, you should not act obstinately, or close your hand to your needy brother. Rather, you should certainly open your hand to him, and lend to him on pledge sufficient for his need that he lacks." (Devarim 15:7-8)*

This posuk seems relatively straightforward, addressing some of the most important issues of any civilized society. Even in the ideal days of the Torah back in the desert, when G-d directly took care of every Jew, the discrepancy between those who have and those who have not was dealt with head on. The solution was for the fortunate to help out the less fortunate, and *Rashi* explains just how far this social responsibility goes:

***"If there will among you a needy person ... The most needy have preference from one of your brothers ... a brother from your father has preference over a brother from your mother ... within any of your gates, in the land ... the poor of one's city has preference over the poor of another city ... you should not act obstinately ... There are people who painfully deliberate whether they should give or not, therefore it states "you should not act obstinately," and there are people who stretch out their hand [ready to give] but then close it, therefore it states ... or close your hand to your needy brother. Rather, you should certainly open your hand to him ... many times, and lend to him on pledge ... If he does not want a gift, then give it to him as a loan ... sufficient for his need (dei machsoro)... You are not commanded to make him wealthy ... that he lacks (asher yechsar lo) ... even with a horse to ride on and a slave to run before him (if that is what he was previously accustomed to and now feels the lack of them) ... [You must] even [help him to get] a wife.***

It is hard to imagine an entire society functioning this way. An elaborate system of welfare is one thing, and a major thing at that. However, *"even with a horse to ride on and a slave to run before him "* because that is what he was used to before he fell from grace? The following is the language of the *Shulchan Aruch*, based upon this week's posuk:

*How much should be given to the poor? Dei machsoro asher yechsar lo ... How is that? If he is starving, feed him. If he needs clothing, clothe him. If he needs items for his house, buy him those items for his house. Even if he was used to riding on a horse with a slave running ahead of him while he was rich, and now he is poor, buy him the horse and the slave-each man according to his needs. If he was used to receiving bread, give him bread. If he was used to receiving dough, give him dough. If he was used to having a bed, give him a bed. One fitting to receive hot bread should continue to receive hot bread; cold bread, cold bread. If he was fed into his mouth, feed him in his mouth. If he came to get married, rent a house for him, prepare a bed for him and house utensils, and find him a wife. (Yorah Dayah, 250:1)*

The Rema, however, qualifies the above halachah:

*"It seems that this is the responsibility of the Gabbai-Tzedakah (the ones appointed over the community-collected money to be dispensed to the poor), or the community as a whole; an individual is not obligated to give another "sufficient for his need," but rather, his responsibility is to make it known to the public that this person is suffering. If there isn't a public body to deal with the situation, then the individual should give according to whatever he can afford."*

The Be'er Heitav adds as well:

*"The Bach wrote that even an individual is obligated to give 'sufficient for his need' if he can afford it, like it said previously in 249:1, and the proof is from Hillel the Elder, who gave to a poor person a fine horse to ride on, etc. However, the Shach says that this is not a proof, since there may not have been a community there, or the community may not have been able to help the poor person."*

It is amazing how much the actual halachah remains true to the intent of the original posuk, perhaps going beyond it as well. However, one can't help but wonder, "Does this not open the door to terrible corruption?" Ask any charitable wealthy person today, and he will tell you about the long line of "poor" people who have queued up outside his front door for a "handout" of some sort ... several times of year. And in Jerusalem, they speak about "poor" people who make more money through tzeddakah than many do who work eight-hour days! (Tax-free, too!)

Though the above is true, perhaps, the real truth is that there are many people who sincerely need the help-lots of it-many of whom are too proud to even ask for it. Unfortunately, as always, corrupt individuals have ruined it for those who authentically require the assistance, either in the form of a gift or a loan. Yet, because of financial stress, many families are falling apart, breaking up, and disappearing altogether.

Personally, I know of an organization that helps rebuild broken families, or helps them to avoid becoming one. However, it has such difficulty raising the necessary funds to help them; answering machines take the calls, and people never call back. Often, the situation seems hopeless. "And the amazing thing is," a woman in desperate need of help told me, "there is so much money out there in the Jewish world alone ..." doing exactly that-remaining out there! Perhaps this is why the Torah finishes off by saying:

*... Lest he cries to Hashem against you, and it becomes a sin for you. You must certainly give to him, and your heart must not be grieved when you give to him, because for this, Hashem your G-d will bless you in all of your work, and in all that your hand accomplishes. For, the needy shall never cease from the land ... (Devarim 15:9-11)*

It is a hard mitzvah to do, and an even harder mitzvah to do right. But it wasn't called "tzedakah" for nothing (from the word "tzedek" which means righteousness), and, as the Talmud says:

*Jerusalem will be redeemed only through tzedakah. (Shabbos 139a)*

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## Shabbos Day:

*"Keep the month of Aviv, and observe the Passover to Hashem your G-d, because in the month of Aviv Hashem your G-d took you out of Egypt at night ... Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, poor man's bread, because you left Egypt in haste ... (Devarim 16:1-3)*

This may not seem like the time of year to discuss the holiday of Pesach, but if the parshah does, why can't we?

If you ask the average Jew, "Why do we eat matzah on the fifteenth day of Nissan at the Seder?" he would quote you the Haggadah, which quotes the posuk: because we left Egypt in haste, and therefore lacked the necessary time to bake bread, as it says:

*They baked the dough which they took out of Egypt, matzah cakes which did not leaven, because the Egyptians sent them out and they could not delay ... (Shemos 12:39)*

The age-old question is, why could we not delay?

The answer given has been quoted for generations now, and seems to make sense, at least at first: because had we stayed in Egypt any longer, then we would have ceased to exist as a nation worthy of being saved. This is based upon the Midrash that states that when the Ten Plagues began, the Jewish people had reached the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity. Thus was the effect of living among the heavily immoral Egyptian people for 209 years! And, had we stayed even one moment longer, we would have fallen to the 50th level, the spiritual point of no-return, right?

Yes, and no.

First of all, according to Kabbalah, there is no fiftieth level of spiritual impurity (according to some, the Arizal says that there is, but Kabbalists point out that there is no written source in the Arizal for this), for Kabbalistic reasons. Furthermore, that spiritually vulnerable state was what the Jewish people had reached just prior to the beginning of the plagues; by the time they had to leave Egypt,

they had long been pulled out from those depths.

This is what the Talmud means when it states:

*The sun that heals the righteous judges the evil. (Nedarim 9b)*

In other words, says the *Pri Tzaddik*, each plague that humbled the Egyptians simultaneously spiritually "cured" the defiled nation of Israel, in preparation for leaving Egypt. After all, it was not the Jewish people who sought out Pharaoh the night they were supposed to leave Egypt; it was Pharaoh who begged the Jewish people to leave. (Even cheder children sing about Pharaoh roaming the streets of Egypt in his pajamas looking for Moshe and Aharon.) According to the *Seforim HaKedoshim*, Pharaoh sensed the weakening of evil in creation, the result of a revelation of a highly spiritual light.

The upshot of this is that the "haste" referred to in the posuk was imposed upon us by Pharaoh, not a need to escape spiritual oblivion. If anyone was facing annihilation on the 15th of Nissan, 2448, it was Pharaoh and the Egyptian people. And had the Jewish people been ready for the Final Redemption, then we would not have left so quickly, and Pharaoh and the evil he represented would have ended then and there.

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## SEUDAH SHLISHI:

*Seven days you shall celebrate a festival to Hashem your God in the place that Hashem will choose, because Hashem your God will bless you in your produce and the work of your hands, only be happy! (Devarim 16:15)*

*"According to its plain meaning this is not an expression of command but expresses an assurance, i.e., you will be happy. However, according to the halachic interpretation, they derived from here that the night before the last day of the holiday is to be included in the obligation of rejoicing." (Rashi)*

Rashi is referring to *Shemini Atzeres*. Elsewhere, Rashi explains:

*What is the source? The rabbis taught: Only be happy! (Devarim 16:15). (Succah 48a) (i.e. what is the source to say that one must rejoice on Shemini Atzeres ... Because it is not written outright, rather, 'The holiday of Succos you shall celebrate ... ' and places 'only be happy' in close proximity.)*

It is always interesting to note such nuances. All the other holidays the Torah speaks about openly, clearly defining what the commandments of the day are. Yet, when it comes to *Shemini Atzeres*, we have to look for hints to find out how to celebrate this day! Why the difference?

This is in keeping with what Rashi says elsewhere, and the Shem M'Shmuel speaks out in much detail. As much as *Shemini Atzeres* follows on the heels of *Succos*, it is not part of *Succos* but a holiday unto itself. It has different mitzvos, and we say a "Shechiyanu" at candle-lighting and

Kiddush. However, the most important difference lies in the meaning it has to the Jewish people as a symbol of their unique relationship with God.

For seven days throughout the week of Succos, sacrifices were not only brought on behalf of the Jewish people, but on behalf of all the nations of the world as well. However, on Shemini Atzeres, sacrifices were brought only for the Jewish people. The Talmud likens it to a king who made a feast for many friends, but after they all left, he said to his closest friend, *"Please, stay, and celebrate with me one more day, without the others!"*

Until Moshiach's time, the special relationship between God and the Jewish people is not always visible and proveable, even to Jews themselves! The Holocaust is a case in point. Sometimes it seems as if that "special relationship" is noticeable only to those strong enough to sing, *"You have chosen us from among the nations ..."* while walking toward gas chambers. They were not claiming to feel joy at that moment, but faith in the knowledge that all the suffering will one day be replaced with intense joy in the presence of the A-lmighty.

Perhaps this is why the joy of Shemini Atzeres is hidden and only alluded to, as if to say, the joy of that special relationship can be felt at times, and at other times, it is a matter of faith. Like the moon, Jewish history waxes and wanes, and the Jewish people have both shone and been eclipsed, left in total darkness and loneliness.

However, by being attached to Succos, Shemini Atzeres also tells us that, just as the joy of Succos is revealed and consistent, one day the joy of Shemini Atzeres and the eternal relationship with the Holy One it symbolizes, will also be revealed and enjoyed-forever. At that time, God's master plan will make sense to all of us, and we too will be able rejoice in all that has occurred.

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## Melave Malkah:

*Three times a year all the males shall appear before Hashem your God in the place that He will choose ... (Devarim 16:16)*

This posuk discusses the mitzvah to make sure that, on the holidays when males ascended to the Temple from all over Israel, they did not come empty-handed. It is an obligation to come to the Temple with a *Korban Re'iah*, a "sacrifice of seeing."

It is a fitting end to a parshah that began with the concept of "seeing." Part of Judaism is to see, and part of it is to be seen. The first part refers to fear of God, which means developing a sophisticated perspective on life that allows you to see the hand of God in every detail of life. The latter refers to making sure to be "seen" in the right places at the right time, by God Himself.

In a sense, these two points represent two extremes of Torah life. "Seeing" is a personal thing, something that is often best achieved at moments we are reflective-and alone. Other people tend to distract us, and we tend to be influenced-even when we don't want to be-by the perspective of others. Alone, we have time and the presence of mind to confront our own thoughts and see what we believe.

However, "to be seen" often means being somewhere, and with other people, for example, in shul on Rosh Hashanah. At such a time, it is important to be part of the collective body of the Jewish people, to be part of the Klal. This is why all the prayers tend to be in the plural.

To be a complete Jew is to walk the tightrope and balance both worlds. Then we can maintain our personal perspectives while at the same time maintaining a firm position with the overall community. It is not an easy task, but then again, whoever said life was supposed to be?

Have a great Shabbos,

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