

ON THE HEELS OF MOSHIACH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And now, Israel, what does G-d want from you? (Devarim 10:12)

Fear of G-d, of course. However, there is another way to discuss the issue. The American government has pledged \$30,000,000 in financial assistance to help re-build Lebanon after the war is over. This is in addition to what she is already sending over in terms of other forms of humanitarian aid, in addition to what many other countries are also contributing. Like Japan after WWII, Lebanon may become a more built-up country through destruction than it was through peace, at the cost of others located far away.

Thus, though the devastation in Lebanon may be staggering, the amount of charity it is prompting world-wide is also staggering, especially given that, unlike Saudi Arabia, the Western nations are not kin to the people of Lebanon. And, that a case could be made that the Lebanese people set themselves up for their own destruction at the hands of the Israel IDF. There hasn't been much talk in the media about money pouring in from the international community to re-build the north of Eretz Yisroel.

In spite of all the evil that exists in the world today, and there are TONS (especially over the Internet), there is also a lot of charity that is done as well. Granted, not all of it is sincere, and in many cases it is merely a matter of solidifying political alliances, but a lot of it IS sincere and is bound to do a lot of good. Bill Gates and William Buffet alone have set aside tens of billions of dollars from their own empires to share the wealth with the less fortunate.

As to the importance of giving charity, the Talmud says the following: Rav Assi further said: "Tzedakah is equivalent to all the other mitzvot combined; as it says, 'We also instituted mitzvot' (Nechemiah 10:33): it does not say, 'a mitzvah', but 'mitzvot'." (Bava Basra 9a)

It is not difficult to see how central a mitzvah charity is, when so many people survive because of it. That's what Hitler, y"s, a purported Darwinist, hated the Jewish people the most: because of the mitzvah of charity, which he said they taught the world, and which he believed allowed the weaker elements of humankind to survive against the way of Nature.

What is not easy to see is why the mitzvah of tzedakah should outweigh all the rest of the mitzvot. Shabbat? No question, since it represents the cornerstone of our faith in G-d as the Maintainer and

Sustainer of all of Creation. But tzedakah, though it too can push our personal envelopes of faith in G-d, it does not actually represent a test of faith in G-d as the Creator or the Sustainer of the world.

The answer to such a question means having a different understanding of the mitzvah of tzedakah. Yes, it is an act faith and trust in G-d to take money from one's own pocket and give it to another who did not earn it from you. However, that may be a secondary issue we will discuss once we recall what the point of Creation is, and what man's role in it is.

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d said, *"Let us make Man in our image, in our likeness."* (Bereishis 1:26) There are probably dozens of explanations as to what it means that we have been created in the image of G-d. However, another question is, why? Was it imperative that we were created in the image of G-d? Obviously it was intentional, which means that we were created to be like Him in some very important way.

The Rambam, in Hilchot Purim explains that, on Purim one must give tzedakah to anyone who requests it because, just as G-d saved a downtrodden nation at that time, likewise should we help those who are downtrodden. However, this obviously is not a halachah that applies only to Purim, but to any Jew all the time. We have been hard-wired to be like G-d.

Indeed, the Sforno on the posuk above explains that "image" is what we are at birth; the rest of life we are supposed to drop the image part and become an actual "elokim", a term that is used for intelligent and decisive beings, like judges for example. The question is, how do you do that? What does it mean to become an elokim in this sense of the word?

G-d has revealed Himself in many ways to man, but perhaps the most revealing part of G-d is how much He cares about Creation and all that is in it. True, He brought forth the Flood on mankind, and much later in time, He brought forth the Holocaust. However, those extreme measures were far from G-d's first choice; they came after many, many warnings that went unheeded, and they were sacrifices for a greater good. And all of these events broke G-d's heart, so-to-speak.

How many six-year olds tell their parents, "YOU HATE ME!" because they can't have a candy before supper, or worse, when the dentist does his job to save their teeth. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Acting in the best interest of the child, the parent instead earns his or her wrath, just as G-d does when events don't turn out the way we plan them.

However, make no mistake about it: all that G-d does, He does because He cares about man and wants man to benefit the most. That is what it means to be G-d, to care to extreme degrees, and therefore what it means to be G-dly is to care to our maximum capacity. When a person is able to expand his heart to care for his fellow man as if each one is his own brother, then he has indeed become an elokim in the full sense of the term, and he has fulfilled his reason to exist.

In that context, it makes sense that tzedakah should weigh-in so heavily in terms of mitzvot. The point of tzedakah is not only to perform charity, but it is to express one's care for his fellow man. That

is why tzedakah need not only be monetary; sometime it might be, "I'm sorry, I have no money at this time, but I pray that G-d see your plight and relieve of your difficulty;" or, "I can't write a check at this time, but can I offer you a cup of water or something?"

The message the person gets is, "I'm sorry I can't help you financially, but I care about your plight", which people do appreciate. On occasion, when I have been in such a situation, but made a point to let the person know that I really wish I could do more for him, the person did not leave before shaking my hand and giving me a brochah that I should be in a better financial situation. The person walks away feeling that he has gained something, even though it wasn't money this time.

Likewise, the actually giving of money is not in place of showing compassion. G-d doesn't just give us, He gives us with compassion. That's why, He will often set the situation up in such a way that we really feel a sense of redemption when it finally comes; you can really feel His care at such times (though He cares ALL the time, though we may not notice it). And we, made in the image of G-d, have been created to act in the same way towards others, and when we do, we fulfill our own potential and that of Creation's as well, as much as we can as individuals.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

You are the children of G-d your L-rd... (Devarim 14:1)

Which, of course, makes our responsibility unique, and it is a uniqueness that has been so misunderstood over the years.

Recently, a friend of mine lent me a book about English grammar, which has been helpful for clearing up some questions I had in terms of my own writing. It is both an informative and entertaining book, but when I arrived at page 75, I was set back by a specific comment the author makes: "Of course, if Hebrew or any of the other ancient languages had included punctuation (in the case of Hebrew, a few vowels might have been nice as well), two thousand years of scriptural exegesis need never have occurred, and a lot of clever, dandruffy people could definitely have spent more time in the fresh air." (Eats, Shoots & Leaves, Truss, Lynne, Gotham Books, 2003; p. 75)

"Hey! Those are our rabbis and Torah scholars you are talking about in such a derogatory manner!" I thought to myself.

As I further contemplated the remark, I saw in it an unintentional compliment, or at least a pointer as to what makes us unique as a nation, the very thing she was trying to do away with by imposing English laws of grammar onto ancient Hebrew texts. She thought that the lack of vowels and commas was simply an oversight by the "authors" of the Torah and Talmud, and that we'd rather be outside in the fresh air than pouring over those central Jewish texts.

The point of punctuation, stresses the author, is to make the text as easy to understand as possible for the reader. A book is not a crossword puzzle waiting to be unraveled by some expert (unless, of course, it is a crossword puzzle book), but a storyline that is meant to carry the reader like a boat

coasting down some stream. Why should we, the reader, have to be bothered with how to read the text, when we'd rather just sit back and be entertained or informed by the author?

But that is specifically why OUR Author left out the vowels and punctuation. The only thing meant to be entertaining about life, for a Jew at least, is the way that G-d allows us to play a serious role in the process of Tikun Olam - World Rectification. Just reading from a Sefer Torah on Shabbos, when the reader supplies everything but the letters themselves, is a major contribution to Tikun Olam.

To be sure, it is not a mitzvah to grow dandruffy, and even the greatest of Torah scholars loves fresh air, but not at the cost of losing a potential moment to unlock a secret of Torah, and perhaps, even a secret of Creation. Entertainment, for the most part, is passive. Torah, for the most part, is active, even if we physically don't go anywhere.

Indeed, there is very little about life in this world that is meant to be passive, except for death itself, and of course, sleep, which is considered to be one-sixtieth of death. In fact, while we wait for G-d's cue to make things better, He is waiting for ours:

This is what King David said, " ... G-d is your shadow on your right side." (Tehillim 121:5). Just as a shadow moves in the direction of the thing that casts it, so too does G-d cause the Worlds to "shadow" the actions of man. The midrash explicitly states: G-d said to Moshe, "Go and tell Yisroel that My name is, 'I will be what I will be.' " What does "I will be what I will be" mean? It means that just as you are with Me, that is how I will be with you. This is what David meant when he said that "G-d is your shadow," for, just like a shadow: if you laugh at it, it laughs at you; if you cry to it, it cries to you; if you present an angry or happy countenance, it will present to you likewise. Thus too is G-d "your shadow"-as you are with Him; that is the way He will respond to you. (Nefesh HaChaim, Ch. 7)

So, as we sit down here, twiddling our thumbs asking, "When will the Creator finally bring Moshiach and end all this insanity?" It turns out that the Creator is in Heaven twiddling HIS thumbs, so-to-speak, asking, "When will My children finally bring Moshiach and end all this insanity?" And so it is a stand-off, one which allows the Sitra Achra to continue his dance on the top of our heads convincing us to maintain the waiting game by remaining passive.

MELAVE MALKAH:

If you diligently keep My commandments which I command you to do, to love G-d your G-d, go in all of His ways, and cling to him, then G-d will dispossess all these nations before you, and you will take from nations greater and mightier than you are...(Devarim 11:22-23)

If only this prophecy would come true NOW, in our time, as our own people fight for the survival, once again, of our tiny country. Who is not wondering where this will all end? We could sure use a prophet today.

However, the Talmud says:

Avdimi from Haifa said: "Since the day when the Temple was destroyed prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the wise." Is a wise man then also not a prophet? What he meant was this: Although it has been taken from the prophets, it has not been taken from the wise. (Bava Basra 12a)

What does this mean? I mean, it's not as if you can go up to a Gadol HaDor and say, "Tell me the future!" However, what it does mean is that there is more to the wisdom of the wise than simply their own personal opinion based upon all their years of learning. It means that, in the merit of all their learning, good deeds, and self-sacrifice for Torah, G-d feeds them additional information and provides them keen insight that is beyond the realm of what might be considered to be "natural".

Amemar said: "A wise man is even superior to a prophet, as it says, 'A prophet has a heart of wisdom' (Tehillim 90:12)." (Ibid.)

A prophet knows the future as a gift from G-d. A "chacham" knows it as a reward from G-d for having labored so hard in Torah and mitzvot. The pursuit of Torah is the pursuit of becoming a partner with G-d in order to bring Creation to fulfillment. Knowing the future helps us do that, as it says, "Who is a wise man: one who knows what is born" (Tamid 32a). As we have explained previously, this means understanding the present to be able to project into the future, something made easier when G-d gives us additional insight.

It's an amazing thing when you think about it. There are so many people in the world today who are considered to be professional analysts. They are watching the way events are going here in the Middle-East, and they are trying to figure out what the outcome will be. Each side in the war has its strategy and desired outcome, but neither side has any real idea what the other side is thinking or preparing to do, so in the end, everyone is in the dark and basically playing it by ear.

An important part of the reason for the uncertainty is because there is a third side: G-d's side. He can move all the pieces around at will, and hence, sometimes the most bizarre events have the most unpredictable results, and before you know it, everything is different from what was planned. "Many are the thoughts of man, but it is the will of G-d that prevails in the end", and if G-d decides to reveal that will to a Chacham, then he can know more about the outcome of war than all the best military and political analysts in the world.

So, at the end of the day, or more accurately, at the END OF DAYS and on the heels of Moshiach, who do you REALLY want to listen to?

Have a great Shabbat,
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Text

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