

PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity, you shall strengthen him..." (Vayikra 25,35)

The Torah teaches that if your fellow Jew has begun to lose his money, but has not yet become poor, it is your responsibility to slow his decline and help him regain his prosperity. Rashi quotes the Midrash, which compares this to merchandise falling off of your friend's donkey. Once the freight has fallen it takes much more effort to pick it all up and to reload it onto the beast of burden than it would take to prevent the fall in the first place.

Rabbi Meir Rubman zt"l explains that after the troubles strike a person helps because they themselves cannot stand to witness suffering. The noble assistance is tainted by self-interest. On the other hand, someone who intervenes to prevent tragedy is motivated purely by feelings of kindness and brotherly love.

This principle of "crisis prevention" can be applied practically in several ways. When Jews in one part of the world start to be beset with problems Jews in more secure or more prosperous regions must rush to assist.

When we see a friend about to fall spiritually, we should jump into action. If we delay, salvaging the situation will be much more difficult.

Perhaps the least obvious application of this lesson is in regard to oneself. People very often can feel themselves "slipping" in their spiritual growth. Self-improvement is, after all, very much like the stock market---we all have our "ups" and "downs." When we feel the drop coming we must call in "spiritual Hatzalah" by acting quickly to catch and support the freight before it falls off the beast of burden. This approach is much more efficient than allowing the fall to happen and then have to expend much more effort to "pick up the pieces".

The lesson is clear---it is far better to deal in prevention rather than the catch up game of intervention.

QUESTION FOR THE SHABBAT TABLE

" Six years you shall sow your fields ...You shall count for yourself seven cycles of sabbatical years, seven years seven times; the years of the seven cycles of sabbatical years shall be for you forty nine years." Vayikra 25:8

The Torah requires that a Jewish farmer adhere to a cycle of 50 years wherein there are six years where one may plant and reap followed by one year of shemittah -- sabbatical. The cycle is repeated seven times and then the fiftieth year --called Jubilee (Yobel) -- follows as another year when the land must lie fallow. Generally, the Torah is usually extremely terse in its language. Our Sages learned many important laws from extra words and even extra letters in the verses of our Holy Book. That is why the Rabbis inquired as to why would the Torah spell out at great length the unnecessary calculation of the Jubilee cycle.

The Parasha explains that we must count six years and then rest the earth for a year. Then the verses explain that this procedure must be repeated seven times. And finally the Torah adds that after seven times seven years or forty-nine years we must observe the Jubilee year. We certainly do not need an extensive math lesson to figure that $7 \times 7 = 49$ -- so why all the details?

ANSWER

There was once a poor man who went from door to door begging for his bread. Frustrated by his poverty he decided to do whatever it would take to earn a little more than he needed to live each day and to save enough to eventually buy a home. His patience and perseverance were rewarded and after many years of saving pennies he was able to buy a respectable abode in a small town far from the city, where real estate was not at a premium. He would brag to those city dwellers with whom he came into contact about the house he had which was larger and more luxurious than what they had in the metropolitan center.

His bragging, however, was met with ridicule. "How can you think that the little you have is worth so much? Were you to try adding up all the pennies you had saved and divided by 100 you would see that your thousands of pennies were really very few dollars and you could not afford much in a "real" neighborhood. In fact, you probably couldn't even get a small apartment with the meager sum you had accumulated."

The Torah's calculation of the years of Jubilee shows us how brief our stay on the Earth really is. One may count days and one may celebrate years but the average person only lives about one and one half Jubilees. One should always keep in mind how fleeting are the days of life in this world.

One should not fall prey to the wiles of the evil inclination who says: "Sin today -- have fun -- there is plenty of time for repentance later." The thousands of days -- the 100 or so years are only 1 to 2 Jubilees. 10,000 pennies are only 100 dollars. Value the fleeting moment and do your best NOW while there is still time to earn your reward for the World to Come.

Shabbat Shalom

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