

Parashat Devarim 5781, 2021:

Tzedakah and Tzion

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

This week's *haftorah*, "*Chazon Yeshayahu*," includes the first 29 *pasukim* of *Sefer Yeshayahu*. While many of these verses are fascinating and a treasure trove of Jewish thought, I find the final *pasuk* particularly intriguing: "Zion shall be redeemed through justice (*mishpat*) and her penitent, *bitzdakah*." (This and all Tanach translations, unless otherwise noted, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) *Bitzdakah* is a conjunction of the letter *bet*, with the connotation in our verse of "in" or "through," and the word *tzedakah*. In turn, *tzedakah* may be interpreted as righteousness or charity, and, as we will see, these approaches are followed by various Rabbinic authorities.

In the view of Rabbi Yosef Kra ben Shimon *zatzal* (1065-1135), who is considered one of the leading interpreters of *Nach* (*Navi'im u'Ketuvim*), "*bitzdakah*" in our *pasuk* must be understood as referring to righteous behavior, as it is in proximity to the word, "*mishpat*:"

And you must know that in every instance that you find the word, "*tzedakah*," in proximity to "*mishpat*," it does not refer to the giving of money [to the poor,] rather, it is an expression of the rendering of true judgment. So, too, do we find [in reference to *Avraham Avinu*,] "*la'asot tzedakah u'mishpat*" ("to perform righteousness and justice," *Sefer Bereishit* 18:19), [and regarding *Dovid HaMelech*:] "*va'ye'hi Dovid oseh mishpat u'tzdakah l'chol amo*" ("and David performed justice and righteousness for all his people," *Sefer Shmuel* II: 8:15, translations and brackets my own)

Based upon this analysis, Rav Kra would translate our *pasuk* as: “Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitent in righteousness.”

An alternative approach is found in *Talmud Bavli*, wherein Ula follows the standard meaning of *tzedakah* and declares: “*Yerushalayim* will not be redeemed except through *tzedakah*, as the text states: ‘Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitent through *tzedakah*.’” (*Shabbat* 139a and *Sanhedrin* 98a) Since Rashi (1040-1105) does not comment on the meaning of *tzedakah* in these passages, we may readily assume that he understands it in its normative sense, in consonance with the positions of the Rambam (1135-1204) and the Maharsha (1555-1631:

...The throne of Israel will not be established, nor will the true faith stand except through charity, as the text states: “You shall be established through righteousness.” (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 54:14) And Israel will be redeemed solely through charity, as the text states: “Zion will be redeemed through judgment and those who return to her through charity.” (Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Zerayim, Matnot Aniyim* 10:1, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger)

[When the text in *Sefer Yeshayahu* states: “Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitent *bitzdakah*,” *tzedakah* actually means] “according to the merit of [the *mitzvah* of] *tzedakah* that will exist in that generation.” This is the case, since one who gives of his money, and gives away that which is his to others, will certainly not steal from others. And through this merit, [authentic] judgment will return to *Yerushalayim*... (Maharsha, *Chidushei Aggadot, Sanhedrin* 98a, translation and brackets my own)

In many ways, the interpretation of *tzedakah* in our *pasuk* as charity, and the emphasis of the Rambam and Maharsha upon its singular import, is congruent with a celebrated statement in *Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra* 9a: “Rav Assi said: ‘*Tzedakah* is the equivalent of all the *mitzvot* of the Torah.’” Little wonder, then, that the Rambam ruled at the beginning of the above-cited passage: “We are obligated to be careful with regard to the *mitzvah* of charity to a greater extent than all [other] positive commandments...”

Whether we follow Rabbi Yosef Kra ben Shimon's lead and interpret *tzedakah* as righteous actions, or take this term at face value as referring to charity, as do Ula, the Rambam and the Maharsha, the message is clear. Yeshayahu is teaching us that we must be cognizant of our behavior toward others, and act with equity towards all humankind. Through the merit of attaining these often-elusive goals, may we witness our people's return to *Eretz Yisrael* and the redemption of *Tzion*, soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic from *klal Yisrael* and all the nations of the world.

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*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav zatzal](#)