



Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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Light Insight

Human Rights

The Five Books of the Torah are the basis of the world's major legal systems. What is considered "human rights" by international jurisprudence is based on the Torah of Moses. And yet, if you look at the written Torah, you'll be hard pressed to find a single mention of the word "rights." Obligations — that the Torah is full of. The obligations of a child to his parents; of a pupil to his teacher; of a community to the poor; of the individual to the community; obligations to the orphaned, to the sick, to the convert; the obligations of man to G-d. "Rights," however, are something that the Torah hardly mentions. Why?

The answer is — to the extent

that *I* have obligations, *you* don't need rights.

You can write a legal code that enumerates people's rights: "that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights..." Or you can write a code which lists their obligations. Yet there is one big difference. When you talk about rights, you cast man in the role of a taker. But when you talk about obligations — you force him to realize that he has been put in this world to give.

Society reveals its nature through the choice of its metaphors. In English, we say "My duty calls." Meaning, I start off unencumbered by obligation. My obligation calls to me. I am over here and my duty is over there. In the Hebrew, we talk about a person being "*yotzei chovato*" — "going out from his

obligation." The Jew starts off by seeing himself obligated. He doesn't have to go anywhere to heed the call. Life and obligation are simultaneous.

In the discussion of the laws of the offering of the Paschal Lamb, the Torah instructs someone whose family is too small to consume an entire paschal lamb by themselves to find a neighbor to join in their *seder* and help finish the Pesach lamb. Obviously, such a neighbor must have been someone not eating his own lamb, probably someone poor. The Torah could just have easily have written: "If you don't have a lamb yourself, go out and find someone who has too much food and eat at his table." Instead, it chose to phrase the obligation in terms of giving rather than taking. The message — prioritize and emphasize our obligation to give and the taking will take care of itself.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Zichron Yaakov

One of the first Jewish settlements in the country, Zichron Yaakov was estab-

lished by Baron Edmond de Rothschild and named in honor of his father Yaakov (James).

It is the home of "Carmel" and other wineries, and the grapes that grow in the vicinity produce the wine sold throughout the country and the world. Its altitude, proximity to the coast and natural beau-

ty has made it a popular vacation area.

The population of Zichron Yaakov is a combination of veteran settlers and new immigrants. There is a sizeable religious community with a wide range of educational institutions, including Yeshivat Ohr Yaakov that was established by Ohr Somayach and attracts English-speaking students from all over the world.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

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Giving people the benefit of the doubt

Judging favorably can turn a “bad” act into a good one, but it can also turn a good act into better one! When someone does you a favor, think: Did he sacrifice in order to help me, or did he simply pull a kind act out of a...

Grab Bag

The other day, my children and I were walking home in Jerusalem shortly before sunset carrying several bags of groceries. The two older kids, age seven and nine, were carrying more than their fair share of the packages. Finally Sarah, who was only 4 and extremely hungry, grew

tired of walking and I had pity on her — and on the ears of everyone on the street — and picked her up along with the bag of sweets she was holding.

We were about 3 blocks from home when suddenly a man came by, grabbed the packages my older son was holding and asked which building we lived in. We told him and he took off running. I vacillated between shock and paranoid feelings that he had just run off with our groceries.

We watched him run down the street with our packages. Then he ran back and passed us, running in the direction from which he had come. As he passed he told us he had put the bags next to the elevator, and I thanked him.

All this occurred just before sunset, and there is a good possibility that the man was in a hurry to go pray the afternoon service before it was too late to do so.

This truly is the Holy Land. A very special place.

Response Line

Alana Jacob wrote:

In the Torah portion of Vayechi, why does Jacob make Joseph swear to bury him in the Land of Israel? It seems a little extreme to make him swear. Shouldn't Jacob have just believed Joseph and trusted him?

Dear Alana,

Jacob trusted Joseph. But he didn't trust Pharaoh. Jacob was concerned that unless Joseph made an oath, Pharaoh would not allow Jacob's body to leave Egypt.

Rabbi Eliyahu Munk explains why it was so important that Jacob not be buried, even temporarily, in Egypt. Jacob wanted to establish the fact that the Land of Israel should be the focal point of the Jewish People. Merely asking

Joseph would not have had the same impact as to the importance of the message for all future generations. Thus, he asked Joseph to take an oath.

Igor Doon wrote:

I am a Jew in Russia and I have one question for you that has interested me for a long time. What happens with a Jew after death? I know a non-Jewish concept about hell and heaven, but I know that such a concept doesn't exist in Jewish tradition. Please explain to me the Jewish point of view. Thank you.

Dear Igor,

Jews believe in life after death. We call it the World to Come. *Gehinom* — a purification process — is part of the World to Come. When a person dies, his soul gets a

chance to “think objectively” about his lifetime spent on earth. Depending on how the person spent his life, this can be a painful process in which the soul mourns its bad deeds, lost opportunities and wasted potential.

Ultimately, the *gehinom* process is temporary, and eventually enables the person to enjoy the benefits of all the good things he did during his lifetime.

Nevertheless, Judaism emphasizes life in this world. Here's a parable to explain: A wealthy man goes on a cruise ship. The ship sinks, and he finds himself afloat in a tiny rubber raft. This raft is his only hope of returning safely to his family, his mansion and all his wealth. Judaism looks at this world like a raft. By following the survival manual — the Torah — this little raft can bring us safely to the World to Come.