

Rabbi Leynor Teaching TZEDAQAH (Righteousness)

Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor (May 21, 2011)

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SHALOM,

I am Rabbi Leynor and today we are going to discuss one of the most important words in the Bible – righteousness. Let's begin by determining what "righteousness" means in English. The word consists of three parts:

Right + (e)ous + ness

- "Right" is defined as "being in accordance with what is good and proper."
- "-(e)ous" means "to abound in."
- "-ness" means "the condition of."

When we put all of the parts together, we find that "righteousness" means, "***The condition of abounding in and being in accordance with what is good and proper.***"

However, as you probably know by now if you have been learning about your Biblical Heritage, the authors of the books of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Jesus were not speaking or thinking in English. Their languages were Aramaic and Hebrew; their culture was the Jewish culture.

Neither Moses nor Jesus ever used the English word "righteousness." The word they would have used was TZEDAQAH. A very good source of information about the Jewish culture is the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, which can be found in many libraries. It is the source of the following information.

Let's compare the following information about TZEDAQAH with the English definition for "righteousness" above:

- TZEDAQAH is defined as "the fulfillment of all legal and moral obligations by doing what is right in all relationships."
- TZEDAQAH is concrete acts, not abstract notions.

- TZEDAQAH is a constant pursuit of justice and the performance of positive deeds, not merely abstention from evil.
- TZEDAQAH is a learned trait resulting from the sustained performance of obligations.
- TZEDAQAH is not an inherent human characteristic.
- The righteous man is the innocent party, while the wicked man is the guilty one.
- The prophets conceived of the ideal society in terms of TZEDAQAH because righteous action results in social stability and, ultimately, in SHALOM (totality, completeness & wholeness).
- Failure to perform TZEDAQAH leads indirectly to the upsetting of social stability and, ultimately, to the deliberate undermining of the social structure.
- Acts of TZEDAQAH within a society restore SHALOM in the world.
- The righteous are called living even after they die, whereas the wicked are called dead even while they are still alive.
- A person may change his or her status from that of wicked to righteous by doing **TESHUVAH** (repentance). Be sure to listen to my lesson on TESHUVAH too. A person's "free will" allows us them to choose which path they will follow ([CLICK HERE TO WATCH](#)).

In the **Late Second Temple & Early Rabbinic Periods**, which was the time of the Jewish Jesus, TZEDAQAH took on the additional meaning of "charity, almsgiving, or practical benevolence." *The obligation to help the poor and needy is stated many times in the Hebrew Bible. It was considered by the Jewish sages of all ages to be one of the cardinal commandments of Judaism.* The importance of TZEDAQAH and its commandment of almsgiving can be seen by the statement that *"almsgiving is as important as all the other commandments combined."*

- *TZEDAQAH is greater than all sacrifices.*
- *TZEDAQAH hastens the redemption.*
- *TZEDAQAH ensures wise, wealthy, and learned sons.*
- *TZEDAQAH atones for sins.*

- *TZEDAQAH is a way to imitate God.*
- *TZEDAQAH saves one from death.*

There is a great difference between the Hebrew understanding of **TZEDAQAH** and the English word **charity**. The Hebrew meanings of TZEDAQAH are as follows:

- *TZEDAQAH is the foundation of social justice.*
- *The needy have a right to alms (TZEDAQAH).*
- *Almsgiving is not a favor done for the poor.*
- *The recipient is not indebted or beholden to giver.*

Every Jew is obligated to give alms. It is performed as a matter of obligation by those possessing the means of providing what is needed. *It is their duty to give it.*

- *The poor do more for the giver by accepting alms than the giver does for the poor by giving alms.*
- *The poor give the giver the opportunity to do this commandment.*
- *The one who receives alms is also obligated to give alms to those in need.*

By returning to the original Hebrew meaning of the word TZEDAQAH, which is translated as “righteousness” in the teachings of the Jewish Jesus, you will be amazed at the way the understanding his messages and mission will be transformed. Jesus said that the “righteous” will inherit eternal life, so it is extremely important for Christians to accurately understand what he meant.

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May the Lord bless and protect you.

SHALOM,
Rabbi Leynor