

True Faith, Real Righteousness

by HaRav Ariel bar Tzadok

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וְצַדִּיק בְּאֱמוּנָתוֹ יַחִיה

Negativity. Some of my readers accuse me from time to time of sounding negative with what I write. I usually respond to such comments with a question. Positive or negative, I ask, which is better? I am almost always told that the positive is better than the negative. Then I ask again, truth or falsehood, which is better? Again, in almost every case I am answered that the truth should always be told and never lies or falsehoods. OK, I say; then what happens when the real truth is negative and not positive; should I tell the negative truth or should I tell a positive lie?

This is where most people get stumped! They so desperately want to hear the positive, even if it contains falsehoods, but at the same time they so desperately want to know the truth. I often get a response in the form of a question; can't the truth be something positive? To this I answer with more truth, however pleasant or unpleasant it may be. I respond and say, we can look at events going on around us and even those inside our own minds and souls; we can interpret them in any way we choose. However, truth is not measured on a meter of more or less; truth is an all or nothing proposition. Truth does not depend upon our personal points of views. Truth is what it is and truth is not falsehood, lies and denials. We can look out upon life with whatever "rose-colored glasses" we choose, but we must never lie to ourselves to believe that our skewed vision is actually what is out there. For this is a definite lie.

I am aware of all too many spiritual teachers, Rabbis and Hasidim amongst them, who always write about positive things and avoid any mention of the negative like it is a contagious plague. They have all kinds of religious and psychological reasons and sources to back up their skewed vision of life. Yet, their addiction to happiness and the positive reminds me of those who are addicted to drugs or alcohol, they seem to be always seeking their next emotional high, and never ever coming down to real Earth to face real life and to address the real issues that are at presently horribly ignored.

One cannot sing and dance away the harsh realities of life. One can pray until the end of time and still there will be negativity and harshness in the world. And there is a good reason for its presence. For the prophets make it very clear, G-d Himself is the author of both good and evil, light and darkness; both serve His Divine commands; both are his messengers, his angels.

There is no dichotomy in the universe. There is no devil, no Satan fighting with G-d for dominion over the universe and over your soul. There definitely is a group of angels whose Divinely ordained job it is to watch over humanity and to report to Higher Authorities all those behaviors performed by each individual that inhibits and harms their own growth. However, they are not acting to punish wanton sinners, there is nothing so parochial about their endeavors. Rather their role is as

teachers to assist each individual soul to grow and to mature. Reality therefore requires that such growth and maturation sometimes needs to come through harshness and negatively reinforced messages. This does not always have to be; nonetheless most times our own careless and reckless behavior solicits such harsh “educational” responses.

We really need to grow out of our infantile views that G-d is the Heavenly “goody-man” and that if I do this or that religious thing, the “goody-man” will reward me with all kinds of “goodies” such as lots of money, popularity, good looks and everything else of superficial nonsensical value. Yet, this infantile belief is exactly how many people view religion and G-d and why many become and stay being religious. They believe that G-d is going to give them all the good things in life and all they have to do is to be happy, sing a religious song, act religious in this way and that, and then “poof!” the magic appears, and G-d makes life on Earth to be an idyllic Garden of Eden.

I have never met anyone who has honestly had this experience for true; although I have met many who really do believe this and they usually they feel it even more once they ingest some drugs, alcohol or some other intoxicant that destroys their organic brain and reinforces the illusions that have cocooned their lives. Happiness can be an addiction similar to drugs or alcohol. Some people cannot seem to live without it and will go to whatever extremes possible to achieve it, even accept illusions and lies.

When religious, they will even slant the religion to reinforce their addictive needs. Needless to say that by doing this, those so inclined blind themselves from reality and open themselves up for all kinds of sorrow and suffering that they could have avoided if only they had their eyes opened and were willing to deal with the harshness and hard times before such things grew out of control and became overwhelming. When the forces of harm are unleashed, the Zohar teaches us that the only resolve one has left is to run and hide. Prayers by themselves do not work at such moments of crises.

G-d created us to live in the real world. Torah is guidance for real people living in a real world. I consider it a very dangerous thing when Rabbis and others turn to the Torah and Bible and reinvent its message into something abstract, philosophical and unrealistic. When Torah is transformed into a “pie in the sky” “cure-all for all ills” we have a big problem. Torah is not magic and absolutely offers no magical solutions to anything. Even simple misdirected blind faith and unquestioning obedience to religious teachings and authorities are no guarantees that one will not succumb to life's harshness and hardships. Indeed, the more one is blind and the less one thinks for oneself, the more one succumbs to life's difficulties.

Torah teaches us to have both our minds and our eyes open to see the real things of the real world. When we hide behind the veil of imagined religion and somehow think that our religion will magically protect us from the realities of life, we are 100% always subject to a very harsh awakening. Reality slaps us in the face with the sting of a hard hand wearing a spiked glove.

Serving Heaven is not done for the sake of reward. All of our religious piety does not merit us “points” in the Eyes of G-d. Many are religious who prosper and many are religious who do not. Being religious is no guarantee for prosperity, protection or anything else. It is truly mythological and infantile to think that we can bribe Divine favor or somehow influence the All-Knowing Mind of G-d. All we can ever do is surrender to the Will of Heaven, rely on Divine mercy, without which none of us would live for another second and simply do the right things, now and forever. We do what is right simply because it is right; not for the sake of reward or for any other material benefit. Doing what is right is its own reward, period. This is the proper service of Heaven. This above all is what G-d wants from us, regardless of who we are.

Life is a test and a trial. It is directed by Heaven to teach and educate us. Our goal is to learn what it means to be human and not to act outside of the natural order as ordained by Elohim, the Creator of Natural Law.

All too often we allow our confused minds to accept behaviors strange and bizarre that if we only stopped to think for a moment we would see just how unnatural and abnormal they truly are. Torah commands us to act with certain rituals. Many of these we apply reasons to, whether or not those reasons be right or wrong. There are some rituals in Torah that defy logic. Were it not for these things being Divine Writ no one would think to do them or care about them at all. So we rely upon The Higher Wisdom that guides us beyond our ability to understand. But this has its limits!

Heaven can ordain for us rituals that to us are bizarre and unusual. But the one thing they are not is unnatural and abnormal. No way! All Torah mitzvot are deeply natural and very much connected to the innermost truths of natural law. It is just that we lack the wisdom to intuit the connection.

This lack of wisdom to connect and intuit truth is the crux of the problem; for without it we come to confuse many things. We often accept words and practices not from Heaven as if it were the Way of Heaven and cling to the ways of the confused mind with fundamentalist zeal and passion. We have no idea how divorced we have become from the natural way, from the Divine Image in which we were created and how distant we have become from G-d.

This distance from G-d and divorce from reality is the true source of the harshness that we all encounter everyday in the real world. Fantasy thinking blinds our eyes from seeing truth. Believing make-believe ideas about G-d and Torah prevent us from seeing the truth about G-d and Torah. This is not Heaven's fault, but rather, it is our own.

I believe that if we really want to make our world a better place and in reality act towards bringing our long awaited Mashiah then we must act with concerted effort to strip away the mythology and fantasies that have become stuck to religion and thus mar its true image and purpose.

Torah is the natural way for the Jewish people and its wisdom goes beyond Israel to serve as a beacon and light for all humanity. Torah is what binds us, to each other, to the natural order and above all, to G-d. No one can live a natural life in contradiction to the natural way. No one can live contrary to true Torah.

True Torah teaches us that life is not a "rose garden," rather it is more like a jungle. What's more we are obligate to learn to live civilly and with all the elevated attributes that defines for us the greatest potential of what it means to be human. Life will always be filled with adversity. Life will never be fair. Bad things will always continue to happen to good people. There is a purpose for all of this, a purpose far beyond what our limited human intelligence will ever understand; but to all things, there is in the end a purpose, a Divine one.

We can never control what happens to us. We cannot bribe Heaven. We do not get "brownie-points" for being good. Yet we act with good because it is the right thing to do, regardless of Heaven. We do what is right because it is the human thing to do, period. We do what is right regardless of the consequences because only by doing what is right do we bring honor and respect to ourselves. We are defined by our character.

We cannot control what happens to us, but we most definitely control how we respond to what happens to us. Our responses to life and circumstances good or bad define who we are and what we are. This is what Heaven watches and based upon this does Heaven judge.

Life is full of negativity; this will never be avoided. All we can do is respond. We can choose to deny reality or we can choose to embrace it. When we deny what is true we fall back into fantasy and religious illusions. We crave and run after happiness because we are terrified to face the sad facts that life is not the joyous occasion that many want it to be. Yet, when we embrace harsh reality and act accordingly; we rise up and as the old saying goes, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going." Heaven does not act through magic; Heaven acts through us. We must do our share and not allow ourselves to be convinced that our share is limited to the fantasy illusions of those too paralyzed and afraid to act.

No, Heaven has not given us the power to do everything. We cannot complete the task of transforming our world into a paradise, but yet, we are not free to stop trying. We must do absolutely everything in our power to make our world better! And although all our efforts will still not be enough; G-d will do that which we cannot. Heaven is waiting for us to do our share, for us to learn our lessons. Only then will Heaven smile upon us all and intervene to introduce us to the fulfillment of our human destiny.

So, in conclusion I plead with you my readers, please, stop the nonsense. Stop interpreting Torah as a "feel-good" experience, stop seeking your own gratification and your personal happiness. Torah, life and reality are not all about you. You are part of the world, the world does not revolve around you. You will find your greater humanity, your personal destiny and fulfillment when you know yourself and offer yourself to the greater good. Real faith is not what you think or believe; real faith is what you do! This is the whole of Torah summed up in brief.

The righteous live by their faith. This is the foundation of their proper behavior. The righteous know that the world is not fair, that it is harsh and full of negativity. The righteous know that they cannot change any of this; but still in order to be righteous, the righteous deal with the reality of this and prove their righteousness even in the most adverse of conditions. This is what proves their righteousness. This is what proves their faith.

For us to be righteous and to be faithful, we too must embrace the proper path of acknowledging truth, however harsh it may be and deal with it in truth, no matter where that truth may take us. It takes a brave and bold soul to serve Heaven properly, but then again, that is what defines for us our humanity. And this, more than anything else does G-d desire from us.