



Asher Manning
Gush Chapter
Director

Equality of Life

‘Inclusivity’ is a word often seen in public discourse today. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as: *“the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or mental disabilities or belonging to other minority groups.”*

This idea is predominantly a Jewish one, and can be found in this week’s Parasha: “ואהבתם את הגר” (Dev 10:19).

In the Tanach ‘Ger’ doesn’t mean convert as it is commonly used today, rather it refers to the ‘other’ - the stranger or otherwise marginalized member of society.

Taking care of those who are lacking, whether materially or emotionally, is a hallmark of Jewish values usually referred to as Gemilut Chasadim. It is a mitzvah to help others fight injustice and recover what is rightfully theirs. The Torah teaches us to be sensitive to those on the sidelines and to make sure they feel included.

The key difference between Chesed and modern Inclusivity lies in the term ‘equal’.

Equality is not a Jewish value per say.

Tzedek is. Tzedek translates as both justice and charity - Tzedakah.

Justice is not synonymous with equality. Unequal privilege may be justified and earned rightfully. Equality before the law does not necessitate equality across the board in all other areas of human endeavors. Many elements in Jewish law and tradition do not conform to the modern drive for equality. For example; a Cohen is not equal to a Yisrael. In certain ways he is superior and in others more restricted. Equality and equity may be beautiful social concepts but they are not foundational to a Jewish world view.

Tedakah demands of us to go above and beyond the letter of the law - to include the marginalized and to try and rectify the injustices inherent in an imperfect world.

‘Ahavat HaGer’ teaches us the sensitivity to be inclusive primarily as a continuum of our forefathers’ legacy – “VeShameru Derech Hashem, La’asot Tzedakah U’Mishpat” (Ber. 18:19).



Avi Diamond

Throughout Parashat Eikev, we read about the greatness of the Land of Israel. Repeatedly, we read descriptions and praises such as “the Land of wheat and barley” and “the good Land”. Like elsewhere in the book of

Devarim, they highlight how good the new Land will be.

”כי הארץ אשר אתה בא שמה לרשתה לא כארץ מצרים הוא אשר יצאתם משם אשר תזרע את זרעך והשקית ברנלך כגן הירק. הארץ אשר אתם עברים שמה לרשתה ארץ הרים ובקעת למטר השמים תשתה מים. ארץ אשר יהי אלקיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני יהי אלקיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה”

What is the purpose of this comparison? Why does Moshe make Egypt seem like an “easy street” compared to Israel? Rav Elchanan Samet explains that Bnei Yisrael experienced two extremes of living, both unfavorable. In Egypt, everything came naturally. Water always flowed, the crops had all they needed, and so did the people living there. Such a life was easily lived without recognizing God’s hand. At the other extreme, living in the desert

depends on overt miracles. No natural water or food sources exist, and only God can supply what they need.

Between these two extremes of forgetting God or relying solely upon God is living in the Land of Israel, explains Rav Samet. Life in Israel takes the good from both and combines them. Life here demands that we work, that God does not supply everything for us. Yet while we are “independent” from God, it is the challenges that make us not lose sight of God’s blessings and recognize God’s hand in our success.

As we enter the month of Elul, may we merit being able to see God’s hand in all that we do, and give thanks for the blessings we are given. ■

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