



# Tzedakah U'mishpat Then and Now

*Tzedakah u'mishpat*, charity and justice. These are concepts that are now part of our Western cultural vernacular after having been introduced to the world and championed by Avraham, regarding whom Hashem said (Bereishit 18:19), "I have known him to instruct his sons and his household after him that they should keep the way of Hashem to perform charity and justice." Avraham lived up to Hashem's assessment as evident in his demand from G-d in the name of justice that He must spare any righteous people in Sodom and then pleaded that G-d charitably spare the entire city in the merit of ten righteous residents (18:24-25).

Upholding those values has remained a core mission of Klal Yisrael, most vividly in the climax of the story of Yosef and his brothers. Yosef had been maintaining a charade for twenty-two

years as he awaited the fulfillment of his dreams that first his eleven brothers would bow down to him and then his parents would do so as well. As Ramban explained (Bereishit 42:9), that is why he never sent a message to his father to inform him that he was still alive, and why when the ten brothers came to Egypt he hid his identity and compelled them to come back with the eleventh so they could all bow before him in fulfillment of the first dream. Presumably when he planted his goblet in Binyamin's bag his plan was to then hold Binyamin prisoner, compelling Yaakov to come down to Egypt to seek to see his precious youngest son and to plead with and bow to Yosef in fulfillment of the second dream. Yet before that could happen, Yosef abandons the plan (Bereishit 45:1): "Yosef could no longer contain himself in the presence of all his attendants." Could Yosef simply no longer control his emotions? After twenty-two years of patient restraint, was Yehuda's speech so compelling that he finally broke?

*Meshech Chochma* suggests otherwise. What moved Yosef to stop the charade and reveal himself was a very conscious and deliberate choice that in the presence of his attendants he could not allow himself to maintain his hardened resistance to Yehuda's pleas for compassion lest he appear to them as cruel and uncaring. Yosef was so fundamentally committed to representing justice and charity that he had no choice but to abort the plan

**In Loving Memory of**

**Arlene Sevrinsky z"l**

**אביגיל פריידה בת מרדכי ז"ל**

**On her 4<sup>th</sup> Yahrzeit, 8<sup>th</sup> of Tevet**

**Rabbi Binenfeld's Zoom shiur  
will be dedicated  
in her memory on this day**

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he had been patiently executing for decades even as it was so close to being completed.

Remarkably, Yosef maintained this commitment in Egypt, a land that was consistently foreign to Jewish mores and never adopted the values of justice and charity. This is clear throughout Egypt's biblical history, from Avraham to Moshe, as the case for justice or charity never played a role in their relationships with the Egyptians. Avraham made no such claim when Sarah was kidnapped (in contrast with his claim to Avimelech), and Moshe – throughout his demands and negotiations with Pharaoh – never asked Pharaoh to resolve the injustice of their slavery and never pleaded for compassion; he simply conveyed G-d's demand that Pharaoh let His people go. Yosef did at one point raise those values when asking the butler to charitably advocate to Pharaoh for his freedom as he had been unjustly sold into slavery and imprisoned (Bereishit 40:14-15), but Yosef was faulted for doing that as those values were so foreign to Egypt that his attempt to invoke them was clearly a desperate act that betrayed a lapse in Yosef's faith in Hashem. Yet, despite the Egyptians' absolute cultural rejection of the values of justice and charity, Yosef was willing to pay a huge price to uphold and represent those same values to them.

We find ourselves today in a different land and a very different situation. *Tzedakah u'mishpat*, charity and justice, are indeed part of our Western cultural vernacular, but they have been culturally appropriated and often deployed against religious values generally and the Jewish people specifically. Yet no less than in Yosef's time it is our charge and privilege as the descendants of Avraham and the heirs of Yosef to not surrender the moral high ground and to stand firmly and consistently for true justice and charity. Much of our Western world distorts

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those values just as Yosef's Egypt rejected them, but we like Yosef will resolutely stand up for them knowing that they represent our core mission since Avraham taught his children the way of charity and justice, and until Zion will be redeemed with justice and its returnees with charity (Yeshayahu 1:27).

We know what justice and charity really mean and we will never fail to uphold and represent them. ■

לעילוי נשמת

SHLOMO TZVI DANCZIGER ז"ל

שלמה צבי בן

ישראל יעקב ורבקה ז"ל

On his 10<sup>th</sup> yahrtzeit - ח' טבת

In loving memory  
The Dancziger Family