

ONE TORAH FOR ALL

Zerubbabel ben Emunah
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Understanding Torah Society

Part 11 – Personal Responsibility

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 4:30

When you are in tribulation, and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you shall return to YHWH your Elohim, and hearken unto His Voice;

The society of Israel is built upon Torah. Each and every single person has a responsibility to keep and to do His commandments. Furthermore, each person within Israel is to help his neighbor and his brother to do the same—help him obey the Torah. This does not mean that one man forces another man to obey His commandments. It is not even possible to force another person to walk in obedience to the Voice of YHWH. One should not even attempt such a thing. It is not pleasing to YHWH our Elohim to attempt to force another to walk in obedience to Him. When one man forces compliance upon another man, what actually happens is obedience to that man, not to YHWH. This is idolatry. This idolatry is not being committed so much by the one being forced, but rather, by the one who is doing the forcing.

Each person's responsibility consists of returning to YHWH through shema. In the above verse the English word "hearken" comes from the Hebrew word שמע "shema," which means to *hear and obey*. No one can do this for another person. Each person must do it himself if he desires to return to YHWH. A person cannot be in a right relationship with YHWH without shema. It is a person's responsibility to learn to recognize, hear (heed), and obey His Voice.

Yirmeyah (Jeremiah) 31:34

"And they shall no longer teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know YHWH;' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them," says YHWH; "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."

Within a Torah society, personal responsibility is essential for the society to be healthy. The aspects of that responsibility are well defined in Torah, including what to do, as well as what not to do regarding one's interactions with neighbors and brothers. More than anything else,

personal responsibility consists of taking charge of one's own actions so that he is hearing and obeying the Voice of YHWH. Sadly, this is not what typically happens today.

Tehillim (Psalm) 14:3

They are all gone aside; they are together become filthy;

There is none that does good, no, not one.

One of an individual's first responsibilities is to realize that there is no one who is righteous, particularly he himself. Each and every person is a flawed person. Each person has his own shortcomings, idiosyncrasies, and character traits which can cause irritations in others. In short, what this means is that, when His Spirit places it upon an individual to go and speak to another individual about something personal, the one who is sent must have his house in order before going. We dealt with this in the previous studies on being a brother's keeper (part 9), as well as being a neighbor (part 10). Under no circumstances can one afford to shirk this personal responsibility.

Upon going to the other person, one's personal responsibility ends upon delivery of the message to the person. That is, while he can help the other person if needed, he cannot, in any way, force the other person to obey YHWH. Obedience is a matter of the heart. If it is not in a person's heart to obey the Voice of YHWH, then there is no external force capable of getting the other person to obey His Voice. Simply put, the first prerequisite of obeying His Voice is to be able to hear His Voice. If one cannot hear His Voice, then how can a person obey His Voice? He cannot!

Ivrim (Hebrews) 1:1-2

1 Elohim, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by different ways and in various manners,

2 has at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

Make no mistake about it: the Voice of YHWH is not limited in how He can speak to a man, or through what agency He may choose to convey His message. He can even choose to speak through the agency of an ass, either the four-legged or the two legged variety. It is then incumbent upon each person to [test every word](#), every spirit, to see if those words have come from YHWH. Until a person tests those words, he cannot know with certainty if those words are from Him. The words must be measured against His written word, the Torah, as well as His Spirit within a man. If they line up, then one is obligated to heed the message, regardless of through what agency the message came. Sadly, when the message is not liked, the messenger often becomes a target of the hearer. When this happens, the message falls by the wayside. Part of one's personal responsibility then, is to make sure the message is properly measured by His Spirit in one's heart and mind, ignoring the qualifications of the messenger, or lack thereof.

Yechezqel (Ezekiel) 33:4

then whosoever hears the sound of the trumpet, and takes not warning, if the sword comes, and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

I would think that in a true Torah society, once a person was confronted with the truth of a matter or situation, all would be done to correct it. This certainly would include the possibility of correcting the sent person's perception of the situation that may be in error, as well as the person receiving the message, who may also be in error.

Part of accepting personal responsibility in a Torah society is realizing that one is a flawed being. As such, one must realize that all he sees and hears may not be properly interpreted by him. For example, think of many witnesses to an accident. Each witness has a very unique perspective. As such, each witness is going to tell a slightly different account of the event in question. Do these differences make one account wrong and another right? No! It simply means that each witness only has a partial view of what happened. One might also consider the story of the six blind men and the elephant. Each man had a very unique perspective on what an elephant was like. Each man was correct, but could not see what the others could see. This resulted in arguing amongst them. For a more complete treatment of this parable please see [The Blind Men and the Elephant](#).

Likewise, when a person sees something which is judged as being against Torah, his perspective is incomplete. What he thinks he saw may be in error. One must be open to this possibility. If he is not, then he is not accepting personal responsibility in the matter in question. Nor has he gotten the log out of his own eye yet!

Yd'aqov (James) 2:10

For whosoever shall keep the whole Torah, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all.

In the eyes of the one true Judge, you and I are lawbreakers. We are guilty of breaking the Torah. According to the above passage, each and every one of us is guilty of breaking each and every commandment. And because we are guilty of such, there is not a single one of us who has the authority to condemn our neighbor or brother.

Furthermore, one must realize that whatever the error is that he feels the need to go and correct, he is also guilty of that same error. If one cannot accept this truth, then once again, he has no authority to go and make an attempt to correct it in another, for he has not accepted his own personal responsibility before His Creator for his own guilt in the matter.

Romans 2:1

Therefore you are without excuse, man, whosoever you are that judges, for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you that judge do practice the same things.

The truth is that when a person sees something in another which he feels is error, there likely is something akin to that in his own heart and life that he detests. It is the very reason it is so easily seen in another. It is the very reason why it is so irritating in a person's mind when seen in another person—it reminds him of what is in his own life. Personal responsibility accepts this and looks squarely in the mirror before going to another.

Taking personal responsibility for one's own life, then, is accepting this truth. Personal responsibility understands that what one sees in another is also a reflection from his own life. Furthermore, this same personal responsibility knows that he must work at getting the log out of his own eye first, in order to help his brother with his speck. One is obligated to go to his brother, to his neighbor, to help him walk closer to YHWH. But in going to one's brother, by the very nature of the Torah society, one must move towards perfection (YHWH) himself first.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 30:8

“And you shall return and obey the Voice of YHWH, and do all His commandments which I command you this day.”

In these days of returning to YHWH, one of the primary things which must happen in each and every individual's life is for him to learn to hear and obey His Voice. One cannot truly return to YHWH and to His Torah without learning how to shema, that is, to hear and obey His Voice. This personal responsibility cannot be given or taken, only accepted by each individual. I cannot do it for you and you cannot do it for me.

Furthermore, it is time that each one of us accepts that YHWH will deal with each person as He sees fit. YHWH gives to each person the light in the order and amount which is according to His will for that individual. Regardless of what I say or how I say it, I cannot give any other person light on any subject. Only YHWH through His Spirit can do that in a person's life. My responsibility in the matter is to speak His message in as clear and concise a manner as possible, without attempting to manipulate or browbeat the listener into submission to His word.

B'midbar (Numbers) 14:18

“YHWH is slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; and that will by no means do away with visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation.”

Part of one's personal responsibility is realizing that he has inherited certain tendencies from his parents and grandparents at least back four generations. Basically, what this means is that if one of your forefathers was an alcoholic, you may very well have that tendency to be an alcoholic as well. It does not mean that you are, or even will be, an alcoholic, but that you will have to overcome this inclination. This applies to every possible wrongdoing imaginable. Whatever sin and transgression any and all of one's forefathers (back four generations) were involved in doing can be inherited. This does not mean that a person is guilty of those same sins, but rather he will have to overcome that particular temptation.

Please note in the above passage the use of the word “iniquity”. The use of this word, rather than the use of “sin” or “transgression,” teaches us that this is a matter of the heart, rather than a matter of action, which is being passed on from one generation to the next. Sadly, the difference between sin, transgression, and iniquity has not always been understood or taught properly. For a more complete treatment of these differences please see the study: [*Sin in Thought, Word, and Deed Every Day?*](#)

Yehoshua (Joshua) 24:15

“And if it seems evil unto you to serve YHWH, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve YHWH.”

Each person must choose for himself whom he shall serve. Whether a person accepts his responsibility to choose or not, he still makes a choice. By not making a choice to serve YHWH, a person makes a choice by acquiescence to not serve Him. The default choice is serving someone or something other than YHWH. A person cannot serve YHWH by accident. Service to YHWH happens only when a person willingly chooses to love Him, and through that love, learns to hear and obey His Voice.

Melakim Aleph (1st Kings) 18:21

And Elijah came near unto all the people, and said, “How long will you go limping between the two sides? If YHWH be Elohim, follow Him; but if Ba’al, then follow him.” And the people answered him not a word.

As Yeshua taught, it is not possible to serve two masters. In the confrontation between all the prophets of Ba’al and Elijah on Mount Carmel, the people were confronted with a choice. Apparently they had fallen so far from following YHWH that they could not make an intelligent choice and did not know who the Creator of all things was. They had followed YHWH with their lips, but served Ba’al with their lives. The result was that they had lost connection with YHWH and did not know Him or the sound of His Voice.

YHWH will not force any person to follow Him. He will not force any person to know Him. He is there, waiting—waiting for His people to come to Him and to have a relationship with Him. YHWH is waiting for His people to shema.

It is a person’s responsibility to shema. It is a person’s responsibility to live by faith, not by works. A person who attempts to live by works cannot shema the sound of His Voice. When a person obeys His commandments, that is, he does Torah, it needs to be because he is hearing and obeying His Voice. There is no other way to live Torah. Any person who attempts to obey His commandments without hearing His Voice is doing so in a legalistic manner and will eventually stumble in his attempts.

As a person hears and obeys His Voice (shema), such a person shall be filled with His Spirit. A person filled with His Spirit watches over his brother and is a neighbor to those around him. A person demonstrates his love of YHWH by the way he is treating his brother and by how he is a neighbor.

A person who accepts his own responsibility understands that his responsibility rests upon a right relationship with YHWH. As a result, he knows that he can never add to or take away from the written record of His Voice.

In a Torah society, when each person walks in the fullness of his own responsibility, there is shalom. There is shalom between each person and His Creator, bringing shalom between each and every person. Every man is under his own tree and eating the fruit of his own vine.

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www.onetorahforall.com

zerubbabel@onetorahforall.com

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