

## **DARSHANUT**

Darshanut, derived from the Hebrew root darash [explicate, expound], presents the expository, homiletic interpretation of the Bible. Its origins are as old as the most ancient aggadic and midrashic teachings and as new as the sermon or D'var Torah delivered on the most recent Shabbat. The intent is a challenge to relate the Bible to the problems, issues and goals of daily living.

We encourage our readers to contribute to Darshanut. The submission should be based on the Bible, no more than 750 words in length, and as relevant and current as you would like to make it. For more information on submissions, see the inside back cover.

### **DO THAT WHICH IS RIGHT AND GOOD IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD (DEUT. 6:18)**

**YOSEF GREEN**

Although this verse appears in a context concerning the Israelite conquest of Canaan, its applicability is universal because it codifies three vital lessons:

#### **IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD**

The Bible became and remained the living law of the Jewish people precisely because it was not merely a book of laws. Over and above its code of laws, enforceable by the courts, there is the law of God, which seeks to make man go far beyond the requirements of the court and of society. Jews never developed a science of law, as did the Romans; instead they legalized every moment of their lives. Every situation, from birth until death, has its requirements in a legal sense, for which a person would be held accountable before the heavenly court.

This will help to explain why the Bible has enjoyed veneration that has also been accompanied by wide-scale neglect. From time immemorial, it has been on the lips of both the learned and the ignorant and the subject of exegesis by Yosef Green served as rabbi of Moreshet Israel in Jerusalem from 1974 until his retirement in 1993. He was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1953 and has a doctorate in Jewish history. Before making aliyah, he served two congregations in New Jersey and taught Hebrew and Judaic Studies at Rutgers University.

men of every faith and devils of every ilk. Biblical law has outlived the law codes of antiquity not because it was meant primarily to serve as the law of governments and states but because it was intended by its Author to be the law of man. *Ye shall therefore keep My statutes which if a man do, he shall live by them* (Lev. 18:6). The law is not meant for priests, levites and rulers only but for man.

#### DO THAT WHICH IS RIGHT

The superimposition of a moral-religious sanction to the laws in the Bible had the effect of conferring upon any mundane action a sacred character. This precluded the creating of a dichotomy in Jewish society between the religious and civil realms. Let us consider the matter of a business transaction. No faithful Jew would ever say, "business is business," or the Yiddish "*Vos is tzu Got is tzu Got, un vos is tzu leit is tzu leit*" [What is to God is God's and what is to man is man's]. Neither can one expiate a breach of business ethics by fasting on Yom Kippur. The laws of the marketplace were given the same intensity in Judaism as those governing ritual infractions, if not more.

*You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures if you are to endure long on the soil that the Lord your God is giving you* (Deut. 25:15). This is one of the three or four times in the Bible that prolonged life is promised. For honesty in dealing with ones fellowman is not only a Divine demand, but also makes for a stable society.

The sages of the Talmud make it clear that theft is theft, no matter how small the amount: "*Din pruta k'din meah v'din meah k'din pruta.*" Though the generation of the Flood was guilty of all sins, its destruction was not decreed until the people indulged in theft. The implication is that theft is destructive to the thief, to the victim, and to society as a whole.

#### DO THAT WHICH IS . . . GOOD

The intent of the Torah is not only to have men live by the letter of the law, but to act *lifnim meshurat hadin* [above the letter of the law], in order to meet the requirements of what is good and fair in the sight of God. In theological terms, the Torah instructs us to live a life of sanctity, *You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy* (Lev. 19:2). Ramban, in his commentary on this verse, observed that there is a vast difference between a legal life and a life of

holiness. A man, he says, can observe the letter of the law to the fullest and still be a scoundrel. The purpose of the Torah is to teach us to sanctify our lives by doing not only what the law requires but what is right and fair in the sight of God.

The people of Sodom, as our tradition informs us, coldly followed the letter of the law whatever the price to the next fellow. In Sodom, there is no compromise with human feelings, there are only legal rights. What is unenforceable in a court of law remains nevertheless a form of moral exhortation so that the Jew would forever be aware that not only what the courts can enforce is subject to God's scrutiny and judgment.

If no society can long endure without the law, neither can it subsist only by the law. A society, to thrive and survive, must be governed by an authority infinitely more inscrutable than any human agency. When R. Hiyya, R. Ammi, and R. Assi were sent out by R. Judah HaNasi to inspect the educational system of Palestine, they came to a town where they could find no educational facilities for either children or adults. When they asked to be introduced to the guardians of the city, they were introduced to the city guards. The rabbis asked with dismay, "Are these the guardians of the city? The guardians of a city are its scribes and its teachers."

What these rabbis meant was that for a society to survive, both physically and spiritually, law enforcement officers are insufficient. Its members must have the Covenant of their law inscribed on the tablets of their hearts. In the final analysis, the most effective guarantee for the survival of any society is the conscience of its members. Moral education and ethical teachings transmitted by exemplary role models is the goal of authentic, historical Judaism. In the example of their lives and cumulative effect of their teachings, Israel's prophets and sages left a legacy to live by.

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