

TZEDAQAH – Righteousness

See Rabbi Leynor's video for this lesson at -- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP2IkOK1LFw>

The word "righteousness" consist of three parts: Right + (e)ous + ness

- (1) Right = "being in accordance with what is good and proper."
- (2) -eous- = "means "to abound in."
- (3) -ness = "the condition of."

In English "righteousness" means "The condition of abounding in and being in accordance with what is good and proper."

The authors of the books of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Jesus did not write, speak, think or teach in English. They wrote, spoke, thought, and taught in Aramaic and Hebrew. Their culture was the Jewish culture.

The sources used for this lesson were the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and Jewish Encyclopedia which can be found in many libraries and online. Check the "Bible Study Tools" link on the BHC website – <http://biblicalheritage.org> .

The Hebrew meaning of TZEDAQAH includes the following:

- (1) The fulfillment of all legal and moral obligations by doing what is right in all relationships. It is concrete acts, not abstract notions.
- (2) A constant pursuit of justice and the performance of positive deeds, not merely abstention from evil.
- (3) It is a learned trait resulting from the sustained performance of obligations. It is not an inherent human characteristic.
- (4) The prophets conceived of the ideal society in terms of TZEDAQAH because righteous action results in social stability and, ultimately, in SHALOM (totality, completeness & wholeness). Failure to perform TZEDAQAH leads indirectly to the upsetting of social stability and, ultimately, to the deliberate undermining of the social structure.
- (5) The righteous are called living even after they die, whereas the wicked are called dead even while they are still alive.
- (6) A person may can change his or her status from that of wicked to righteous by doing TESHUVAH (repentance). "Free will" allows us them to choose which path we will follow.

In the Late Second Temple & Early Rabbinic Periods, TZEDAQAH took on the additional meaning of "charity, almsgiving, or practical benevolence." The obligation to help the poor and needy is stated many times in the Hebrew Bible. It was considered by the Jewish sages of all ages to be one of the cardinal commandments of Judaism.

The importance of TZEDAQAH and its commandment of almsgiving can be seen by the statement that *"almsgiving is as important as all the other commandments combined."*

- (1) TZEDAQAH *is greater than all sacrifices;*
- (2) TZEDAQAH *hastens the redemption;*
- (3) TZEDAQAH *ensures wise, wealthy, and learned sons;*
- (4) TZEDAQAH *atones for sins;*
- (5) TZEDAQAH *is a way to imitate God;*
- (6) TZEDAQAH *saves one from death.*

The Hebrew understanding of almsgiving and the English word charity are very different:

- (1) TZEDAQAH is the foundation of social justice.
- (2) The needy have a right to alms (TZEDAQAH).
- (3) Almsgiving is not a favor done for the poor.
- (4) The recipient is not indebted or beholden to giver.

TZEDAQAH is performed as a matter of obligation by those possessing the means of providing what is needed.

- (1) It is their duty to give it.
- (2) The poor do more for the giver by accepting alms than the giver does for the poor by giving alms.
- (3) The poor give the giver the opportunity to do this commandment.
- (4) The one who receives alms is also obligated to give alms to those in need.

When the Jewish Jesus used the word TZEDAQAH the above meanings were attached to it. His Jewish audience understood what he meant, but the later Gentile Christians didn't know the Jewish culture.

According to Jesus the "righteous" will be the ones who inherit eternal life – that makes it one of the most important words he taught.

By learning the original Hebrew meanings of the words which the Jewish Jesus used, you will be amazed at how the words of your Bible take on completely new meanings.

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