

Echoes of Eden

With All Your Hearts and All Your Souls

All over the world, every day, for millennia, Jews recite the three chapters of the *Shema*. The first chapter is found in Parashat VaEtchanan, last week's Torah reading. The second chapter is found in this week's Parasha, Ekev.

At first glance, there seems to be quite a bit of repetition between the chapters. For example, the first chapter instructs us to “love God with all your hearts and with all your souls and with all of your resources”. The second chapter repeats this instruction, “love God with all your hearts and all your souls”. This apparent repetition suffers from a glaring omission: the obligation to love God with all of our available resources (often understood as monetary resources, possessions) is missing in the second chapter.

This problem is exacerbated by translation into English; in Hebrew, the difference between the two chapters is more apparent, and this is the key to understanding the omission.

The first chapter is stated in the singular and speaks to the individual, while the second chapter speaks in the plural, and addresses the collective.

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What emerges from this observation is that the individual is bidden to love God with all of his or her resources, while the community does not have this obligation.

This distinction and its implications are closely related to the well-known yet often misunderstood concept of *tikkun olam* – “fixing the world”. The Mishna in Sanhedrin (37a) teaches that whoever saves one life saves an entire world. In

Judaism's value system, every life is of infinite value. Nonetheless, the Mishna in Gittin teaches that when redeeming captives, one should not "over-pay":

Captives should not be redeemed for more than their value, because of *tikkun olam*. (Gittin 45a)

Prima facie, this seems to be a very strange application of "*tikkun olam*", which many people associate with the "warm and fuzzy" side of Judaism, the Jewish impulse to make the world a better place. In this case, the very same sages who invoke the sanctity of life and the duty to uplift the world- put a price, a monetary value, on the life of a captive. By introducing such pedestrian concerns into the equation, they tacitly condemn the captive to death if the price for release is deemed too high!

The picture comes into sharper focus if we understand the concept of *tikkun olam* in this instance as an expression of macro-economic considerations. Apparently, the halakhic constraints that bind the community differ from those that bind the individual. Even something of infinite value has a price, and that price can be tangible, finite. Had this not been the case, the community as a whole would be obligated to spend all of its collective resources to save one life. And as cruel as it may sound, this would be devastating as a long-term strategy for any community.

Here, then, lies the reason for the glaring omission we noticed in the second chapter of the *Shema*: When the community is addressed, "all your resources" is missing. Communal resources are to be used for the betterment and preservation of the community as a whole, according to the wisdom and the conscience of its leaders. Pragmatism, a word (unfortunately) not usually associated with religion, is a positive guiding force, an overriding consideration in the calculus of resource allocation.

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messages of the second chapter of the *Shema* is another obligation: Simply put, we are obligated as a community to be responsible, to behave in a logical and pragmatic fashion, to spend our communal resources with sensitivity and reason. That is the true meaning of *tikkun olam*.

For a more in-depth analysis see <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2013/07/essaysand-audio-ekev.html>