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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...

14 Iyar – Pesach Sheni 5768

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The Kibbutz Today

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Parashat Vayishlach 5767]

Question: Is the kibbutz ideal appropriate for today or for the future, or perhaps not at all?

Answer: The Torah does not say “kibbutz” and it does not say “not kibbutz.” What it says is: Do kind deeds for people, love them and help them. Everyone must calculate the best way for him to perform lots of kind deeds.

Maran (our revered teacher) Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook was asked by “Ha-Poel Ha-Mizrachi” – the Religious Zionist Labor Organization – what regime the Torah wants for the Jewish State. After all, “Ha-Poel Ha-Mizrachi” had socialistic leanings. What characterizes a capitalistic regime is its freedom and liberalism. Everyone does whatever he likes, and economic life achieves a balance amidst the struggle of market forces. In a socialistic regime, the government intervenes. It has control over the means of production and over the size of salaries.

Rav Kook responded: Without getting into the question of what the Torah wants, it is clear that a regime of private property is undesirable if we are to fulfill everything written in the Torah (Igrot Gedolei Yisrael, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Shragai).

Indeed, if someone helps the poor in accordance with his duty, nothing will be left for his

own needs. We have an important principal that one's own life takes precedence over the life of his fellow man (Baba Metziah 62), yet one's luxuries do not take precedence over the life of one's fellow man. The same ruling appears in the letters at the end of the Sefer Ha-Tanya, and as well as in Aruch Ha-Shulchan (Yoreh Deah 251), the Chafetz Chaim's Ahavat Chessed and Maran Ha-Rav Kook's Responsa Orach Mishpat.

The source is in the Talmud (Nedarim 80), which states that it cannot be that one person can be doing his wash if another lacks drinking water. It is true that there is an opinion that one is allowed under such circumstances to do one's wash, because dirty clothing can breed sickness. Let us therefore say simply, it cannot be that you will water your garden and your fellowman will have no water to drink. It cannot be that you will eat ice cream and your fellowman will have no food. It cannot be that you will have a video and your fellow Jew does not have a bed, etc...

According to Halachah, you must give your fellow everything he needs, in accordance with your ability. You are not obligated to make him wealthy, but you must provide him with his essential needs. How does one gauge "essential needs"? That is a complicated business, but it is clear that you cannot live in luxury while your fellow lacks the minimum.

At the end of his work "Ahavat Chessed," Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan – the "Chafetz Chaim" – explains that at one time people were poor, but now times have come when we are relatively rich. Obviously, he is not talking about countries like China, in which a laborer earns twenty-five cents a day, and if he is a skilled laborer, a dollar a day, and they are content that they have got something to eat. Nor is he talking about India, where a worker earns twelve cents a day.

Yet the State of Israel is a wealthy country, amongst the twenty wealthiest countries on earth. Our lives are full of luxury, from telephones to tape recorders to nice furniture. The Chafetz Chaim says this about his own times, and it applies all the more regarding our times, thus reinforcing our duty to supply the poor with their needs, in accordance with our ability.

It is true that our Sages set a fixed rate of "ma'aser", how much we must give to the poor, namely a tenth. The Torah did not stipulate such an obligation. It only says that we must give in accordance with the poor man's needs and our own ability. It was our Sages who assessed that our ability is ten percent. Yet the Chafetz Chaim in Ahavat Chessed explains

that this is referring to medium-income people. The poor should give less. They cannot give ten percent when they are in bad overdraft already at the start of the month. Likewise, the rich man can give much more than a tenth of his profits. For example, if someone earns a million dollars a month, and in this country there are many like that, even if he gives 99% of his profits, he will still be left with ten thousand dollars to live on, and he will be able to live in luxury.

The time has come to give. To give!