



# DVAR TZEDEK

## Parashat Ha'azinu 5775

By Rabbi David Singer

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The Torah's five books end with one last passionate plea from the Israelites' leader. As Moses concludes his instructions to the people, preparing them to enter the Land of Israel, he emphasizes that they must "teach the words with which I charge you upon your children, that they may observe faithfully all the terms of this teaching. For this is not a trivial thing for you: it is your very life; through it you shall long endure..."<sup>1</sup> Moses begs his people to raise their children according to the same values and laws to which they themselves are dedicated.

Commenting on this verse, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Galician scholar, explains that one who raises a child in Torah never dies. He adds that "a person lives eternally through Torah."<sup>2</sup> The values upon which we raise our progeny are the means through which we gain eternal life. Our individual acts are only temporary; our presence on earth gains eternity when we raise the next generation to follow our lead.

As we near the completion of our Torah reading cycle, those of us dedicated to global justice would do well to take Rabbi Kluger's message to heart and reflect on how we are transmitting the Torah of social justice to the next generation. It is not enough to bring justice to this world; we must also continue to educate ourselves and our children in the ways of this Torah and its messages of peace, equality and the ideal of a righteous society.

Yet when I look at the Jewish communal landscape to see how we're transmitting this message to our children, I am often disappointed. So many synagogues and schools talk about *tikkun olam*, yet its main physical expression is a single communal "mitzvah day" or other lone justice-related event. Let's be clear: each act of justice is a good thing that should be encouraged and celebrated. But if we are to live eternally through Torah, if we are to engrain this teaching and these ideals wholly into our lives and the lives of our children, then we cannot devote but one day to the act and then close up shop.

We must also remember to educate. Even communities that do have regular social justice programming often limit it to action and leave out thought. They may have a regular shift at the local soup kitchen but rarely educate volunteers about broader issues of hunger in the community or explore why this act of service is such an integral part of living a life based on Torah. For social justice to become part of the Jewish fabric of the next generation, it must be a regular act and it must be integrated into and reinforced through education.

We would be well-served to think seriously in this new year about the ways in which we educate ourselves and our children toward dedication to the pursuit of justice, and then offer holistic opportunities to put that learning into practice in communal life. For example, how many of our synagogues focus parts of their religious school curricula on

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<sup>1</sup> Dvarim 32:46-47.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, *Iturei Torah*, Vol. III, 328.

Jewish ethics and *tzedek*, in addition to the study of Jewish holidays and prayer? What opportunities for adult learning exist in the area of justice? AJWS, as well as many other worthy organizations, offers a plethora of educational resources on issues of justice as seen through a Jewish lens, ranging from single-topic programs to entire multi-session curricula.<sup>3</sup> Let us dedicate this new year to evaluating this gap in our pedagogy and filling it with more learning.

By strengthening our justice education, we commit ourselves and our children to applying the Torah's vision of a more just society to our lives and to the world. We ensure that these ideals will thrive in the next generation and continue to grow from the foundation that we have already built.

The Torah concludes with Moses's death on the precipice of the entrance to the Land of Israel. He never makes it to the Promised Land. We, too, may never fully realize our dreams of a world full of justice. But even if we do not make it into the sweet land that we seek, the next generation still may. They can—if we empower them fully with the education to support their endeavors to build a more just society. The importance of this education cannot be under-emphasized.

After all, as Moses reminds us, this is not a trivial thing. This is our very life.



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<sup>3</sup> To access AJWS's educational resources, visit [www.ajws.org/education](http://www.ajws.org/education).

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