Middah Reflection #5

Pursuit of God in Justice

By Shmuly Yanklowitz

There is a religious crisis in our age! Many seek closeness to G-d but not to assist humankind in a rigorous fashion. Others seek to help people but abandon the Ribbono Shel Olam. Jewish social justice makes the radical claim that one only comes closer to G-d by seeking justice for G-d's creatures. Heschel said it quite simply: "Seen from the perspective of prophetic faith, the predicament of justice is the predicament of God," (Religion and Race, 93).

Rav Yisrael Salanter argues that another's physical needs are our own spiritual needs. For us to stand with integrity before the Abishter, we must be helping those who are sick, mourning, in poverty, or oppressed. As Rav Shlomo Carlebach poetically and inspiringly put it:

"What is it really to have a covenant with God? A lot of people have a covenant with God and they are God drunk. They are completely with God, but they are not world drunk. They don't see the people anymore, especially if the people are pagans, according to their theory. A person who has a true covenant with God has to be completely aware of every little pagan in the world. If Abraham would not have welcomed the three angels who were disguised as pagans, he would never have had Isaac and there would never be a Messiah, and whole world most probably would be destroyed one way or another!" (Holy Brother, 19).

One can not achieve religious virtue without developing sustainable and developing midot of chesed and tzedek. In Derech Hashem, Rav Luzzatto explains that the soul has 5 parts: "*nefesh* (soul), *ruach* (spirit), *neshama*(breath), *chayah* (living essence), and *yechidah* (unique essence)." To ensure the vitality of each part of the soul, one must seek out different ways of giving. Which types of *tzedek* and *chesed* work do you propose give life to each spiritual compartment of the self? How can we do our social justice work and our activism in a way that ensures that we are coming closer to G-d and closer to becoming G-dly?