

LET JUSTICE ROLL LIKE WATER

Amos 5:23-24

23) Spare Me the sound of your songs,
And let Me not hear the music of your lutes.

**24) But let justice roll like water,
Righteousness like an unfailing stream.**

הִסַּר מֵעָלַי הַמּוֹן שְׂרִיד
וְזָמַרְתָּ נְבִלָה לֹא אֶשְׁמַע:
וַיִּגַּל כַּמִּים מְשַׁפֵּט
וַיִּצְדַּק כַּנַּחַל אֵיתָן:

Letter From a Birmingham Jail

...I have not said to my people: “Get rid of your discontent.” Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist. But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you.”

Was not Amos an extremist for justice: “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.”

Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”

Was not Martin Luther an extremist: “Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.”

And John Bunyan: “I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.”

And Abraham Lincoln: “This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.”

And Thomas Jefferson: “We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal...”

So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?

Matthew 5:1-12 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

- 8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
 9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
 10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 11 “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against
 you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in
 the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Likutei Moharan, Part II 15:1:6

Now, *tzedakah* (righteousness) has the qualities of water, as in “Who turns the rock into a pool of water” (Psalms 114:8). “The rock” corresponds to “the rock of my heart” (Psalms 73:26), because there is “a heart of stone” (Ezekiel 36:26)—as in, “the hard-hearted are far from *tzedakah*” (Isaiah 46:12). That is the meaning of “Who turns the rock into a pool of water.”

This is to say, the heart is turned soft, like in the manner of, “pour out your heart like water before God” (Lamentations 2:19)—which is to say, a soft heart gives *tzedakah*. This is the reason that *tzedakah* is referred to as water, as it is written (Amos 5:24), “*tzedakah* like an **unfailing stream.**” This is also the manner of the verse, “Cast your bread upon the waters” (Ecclesiastes 11:1), which is said in regard to *tzedakah*.

וְצַדִּיקָה הִיא בְּחִינַת מַיִם,
 בְּבְחִינַת (תְּהִילִים קִידָח): „הַהֶפְכִי הַצּוֹר אֶגְמִים
 מַיִם“. הַצּוֹר - זֶה בְּחִינַת (תְּהִילִים ע"ג:כ"ו):
 „צוֹר לִבִּי“, כִּי יֵשׁ „לֵב אֶבֶן“ (יחזקאל ל"ו:כ"ו)
 - דְּהִינוּ „אַבְיָרֵי לֵב הָרְחוּקִים מִצַּדִּיקָה“
 (ישעיהו מ"ו:י"ב).
 וְזֶהוּ: „הַהֶפְכִי הַצּוֹר אֶגְמִים מַיִם“.

דְּהִינוּ שְׁנֵתֵהֶפֶד לְלֵב רַךְ, בְּחִינַת (איכה ב'י"ט):
 „שִׁפְכִי כַמַּיִם לִבְדֵּךְ נִכַח פְּנֵי ה'", הִינוּ לֵב רַךְ
 לְהִתְנַדֵּב לְצַדִּיקָה.
 וּבִשְׂבִיל זֶה נִקְרָא צַדִּיקָה מַיִם, כְּמוֹ שְׁכֵתוֹב
 (עמוס ה'כ"ד): „וְצַדִּיקָה כְּנַחַל אֵיתָן“.
 וְזֶה בְּחִינַת (קהלת י"א:א'): שֶׁלַח לַחֲמָדָה עַל פְּנֵי
 הַמַּיִם, הַנֶּאֱמָר בְּצַדִּיקָה.

