PERASHAT REE: ¿How does HaShem open your hand?

There is a very well known pasuq (verse) in Tehiim. We say every day of the year, three times per day. And this pasuq has a particularity. It must be said with kavana, that is, thinking about what we are saying. To the point that if you did not recite this verse paying attention to its meaning, you should say it again. This verse is found in Tehila leDavid (ashré …), Psalm 145. Pasuq, 145: 16, reads: "poteakh et yadekha …". The conventional translation is: "You open Your hand and satisfy all creatures according to their will" (or as per Rashi, "… according to Your will"). Either way, the traditional explanation is that this pasuq speaks of "the hands of God," which is obviously a metaphor. And it means that in due time (be'itó) the Creator "opens His hands" and grants His blessing, providing food for all living things. HaShem has designed a miraculous, highly sophisticated mechanism, which scientists call "ecology" or "food chain", through which food is assigned to all living creatures. It is no wonder then, that this pasuq should be read carefully, to reinforce our belief that our livelihood depends on the will of God as well.

As we all know, the Tora allows (or requires us) multiple interpretations. There are literal interpretations (peshat) and non-literal interpretations (derash). The difference is that while non literal readings could be expressed with a wide linguistic license, literal interpretations must fit the standard semantics of the Hebrew language. And usually, while non-literal interpretations are often very abundant and diverse, the literal meaning is reduced, usually, only to one possible reading.

Our pasuq in Tehilim is an exception to this rule. As it lends itself to an alternative (perhaps complementary) reading that adheres strictly to the literal sense of its words. How can that be? In Hebrew, verbs in the present tense are identical for the first, second and third person in singular. In Hebrew, "I write, you write or he writes," is said in the same way "KOTEB".

Now, the first word of this verse, POTEAH, is usually read: “[You, HaShem,] open Your hand and satisfy all creatures according to their will.” But the first three words in Hebrew can also be read in a different way, without violating the literal sense; “[HaShem] opens your hand, and satisfy all creatures according to their will.” In this second reading The Creator does not open His hand, He opens “our hands”, human hands, to satisfy all creatures.

According to this second reading, HaShem somehow opens our hands to help those who do not have what to eat and satisfy the hunger of others.

But, how is it that God opens our hands?

The answer is found in the Tora portion of this week, Re-e. In Chapter 15:7 the Tora speaks about the Mitsva of Tsedaqa. God asks us not to close our hand when our brothers needs help (לא תקפוץ את ידך מאחיך האביון). And in the next pasuq 15: 8, the Tora uses words that is impossible not to associate with our pasuq of Tehilim. Debarim 15: 8, says: “Rather, you must open your hand [to your needy brother] and provide him all that he lacks”. In Hebrew” patoah tiftah et yedekhá it (פתוח תפתח את ידך לו) “.

According to this interpretation, God opens our hands through the Mitsva of Tsedaqá, and by opening our hands, He grants each person what they need.

Thus, through Tsedaqá, we become an instrument of God. We are part of this Divine Ecology, a human chain of hesed that HaShem established to give everyone what they need.

According to this interpretation, when we open our hands and say POTEAH ET YADEKHA, we are not thinking only of what our hands will receive. Rather, we focus on what our hands are going to give.

Shabbat Shalom!