

“HEROIC FAITH”

Last week as Katrina devastated the gulf coast, we read in the Torah: “If there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman (Deut. 15:7). The first obligation is not explanation but action. When others suffer our tradition commands us to help.

But what remains for those who have lost everything? We cannot avoid loss, but can we avoid despair? Can we have unconditional faith, faith that does not depend upon good fortune?

Crystallizing the teachings of the prophet, Viktor Frankl writes the following in his book The Will to Meaning:

“The unconditional faith in an unconditional meaning may turn complete failure into a heroic triumph. That this is possible has not only been demonstrated by many a patient in our days, but also by a peasant who lived in biblical times, somewhere in Palestine. His were granaries in the literal sense. And they were literally empty. And yet, out of unconditional trust in ultimate meaning and an unconditional faith in ultimate being, Habakkuk chanted his triumphant hymn:

“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall. Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation (Habakkuk 3:17, 18)”

In tragedy, generosity lifts the souls who were spared, and heroic faith can sustain those who are suffering enabling them to overcome despair.