



Ashreinu אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

Looking Beyond Yourself

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Everything written in the Torah was placed in the perfect place. Yet, we find in this week's parsha a mitzvah that seemingly comes up out of nowhere.

The Torah tells us:

לא תראה את שור אחיך או את שיו נדחים
והתעלמת מהם השב תשיבם לאחיך
(22:1)

"You may not observe your brother's ox or his sheep lost and conceal yourself from them; you must surely return them to your brother"
(Devarim 22:1)

The Torah here teaches us about a mitzvah that we are very

familiar with, the mitzvah known as hashavat aveidah (returning lost objects). It is interesting to note that it comes after the Torah just shared with us the mitzvah of the laws of going to war (as stated earlier in the previous perek). What is the nature of this juxtaposition? What is the connection between when you go out to war against your enemies and returning lost objects?

The Ibn Ezra (Rav Avraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, 1089-1164) offers a tremendous insight regarding the placement of this mitzvah. The Ibn Ezra explains that the juxtaposition teaches that the obligation of hashavat aveidah applies even when one is going out to war.

One could have assumed that the intensity of emotion that overwhelmed the soldier as he readied himself to leave his home and fight for his people would have exempted him from the mitzvah of hashavat aveidah. Wouldn't it make sense for the Torah to exempt an individual who is about to go out to war from the performance of this mitzvah? Is not readying one's self for battle considered a mitzvah, which should exempt the soldier from the performance of other mitzvoy (in this case returning the lost object)?

The Torah here is teaching us an invaluable lesson. A military camp during war is a tumultuous, tense, and unstable setting. It is an environment in which people are naturally inclined to focus on self-preservation and, as a result, may rationalize ignoring the needs of others. Therefore, the Torah is teaching us that we are to go above and beyond our natural human instincts and employ the highest standards of sensitivity, even during this most stressful and pressurized of situations.

Rav Henoch Leibowitz zt'l (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim, 1918-2008) explains that the Torah is teaching us that we have the ability (and obligation) to be sensitive to the needs of the other, even in the most trying of times. Our minds may be occupied with our own survival; nevertheless we can, and must, be conscious of our neighbor's needs at all times.

There is a chasidic story told about the Ba'al Ha-Tanya, who was once learning Torah in the inner room of the house while, in the next room, his son was also studying. In the third, outermost room his infant grandson, who had been previously sleeping, suddenly awoke and started to cry. The Ba'al Ha-Tanya immediately jumped up and tended to the baby's needs while his son, whose room was closer to the baby, remained engrossed in his learning and oblivious to the sounds coming from the outer room.

On the way back to his room the rebbe chastised his son, "If someone is studying Torah, and fails to hear sounds of a crying baby, there is something wrong with his Torah learning."

There are times when we encounter personal difficulties and challenges. There are times when we feel like the only things we can focus on are our own problems as we are overwhelmed by the enormity of our circumstances. It can happen that during these times of personal stress we lash out at others and justify these behaviors by pointing to the intensity of our circumstances. We learn from the mitzvah of hashavat aveidah that we must uphold the highest standards of interpersonal conduct even during personally trying times.

A ba'al chessed (kind individual) is not someone who engages in random acts of kindness, rather it is someone who maintains a continuous sensitivity to the needs of others in all circumstances and at all times.

Help! I Need Somebody!

Jordan Landes ("18)

"You may not look upon your brother's donkey or ox fallen in the roadway, and turn your eyes away from them; rather, you shall surely lift them up with him"
(22:4).

This pasuk teaches us that we are obligated to help the owner of a struggling animal return a burden on top of the animal's back. However, the midrash points out that this verse only requires us to help the owner, but not to step in and fulfill the duties of the owner. It is not our job to replace the burden while the owner sits back and relaxes. It's easy to imagine the owner walking away and saying, "since it is your mitzvah to load the animal you should do it." The midrash tells us that we have no obligation to perform this mitzvah in the case of a neglectful owner. The pasuk specifically says, "with him" in order to exempt an individual in the case of an owner who neglects all responsibility for his animal.

The Chofetz Chaim (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, 1839-1933) says that this same principle applies to spiritual matters. If we want God to step in and help us "carry our burdens," we also need to put in the effort. If a person prays and asks Hashem during his daily davening to help "guard my tongue from evil," and then actually goes and makes an effort to refrain from speaking gossip, then God will surely help him. But if one does not take action and fulfill his word, how can he request God's help? You first need to uplift yourself before expecting God to assist.

Sadly, many times in life there are obstacles we want to overcome and goals we want to accomplish, but we don't put in the proper effort or dedication to successfully achieve them. You have to be willing to take the first steps on your own quest, and have faith that God will be there right next to you every step of the way. But you must start somewhere. The question is: when will you start?



The Roots of Cynicism

Sydney Freedman ('20)

This week's parsha, Parshat Ki Teitzei, includes the commandment to remember what Amalek did to us in the desert. What was it about Amalek that made them such mortal enemies of ours? What set them apart from all the other nations? While there are many answers to this question, there is one that I'd like to mention specifically.

Amalek is the perfect example of the skeptic. After we left Egypt, all the other nations were in complete awe of both our nation and our God. Amalek was the first to attack us after our miraculous exodus from Egypt. They resolved others' fear of Hashem with mere skepticism, shrugging their shoulders and attacking us despite all logic. In addition, the word Amalek has the same gematria as the word "safek," doubt!

While we may not be able to identify Amalek individually today, you don't have to look far to observe the skeptical attitude. It is very easy to be cynical about the existence of a concealed God. It is our job to maintain our emunah and faith in Hashem, regardless of the skepticism we may face, either within ourselves or in others. May we all have a year full of optimism and free of skepticism!

Proper Speech

Shmuel belizon ('20) as taken from Shlomo Ressler

There is a pasuk in Parshat Ki Teitzei that reads, "And if you desist from vowing, no sin will be found with you" (23:23). The pasuk seemingly implies that one who makes a vow will already be found at fault, even if he/she fulfills the vow. Why is this true? What if someone vows to do a good deed and fulfills that vow? What could possibly be wrong with doing that? Jonny Gewirtz, in his weekly publication Migdal Ohr, offers an insightful answer. Since one can fulfill any mitzvah without a vow, the vow (neder) merely serves as a potential obstacle for a Jew. If one makes a vow to fulfill a commandment and then does not

actually fulfill the mitzvah, he has not only passed up on doing a positive commandment, he has also committed a sin by transgressing his vow. On a deeper level, though, one who avoids making vows entirely will avoid all types of sins because he is aware of the power of the tongue. He realizes that words, once spoken, cannot be retracted, and thus is very careful as to what he states. This awareness applies not only to vows but to all aspects of speech: lashon hara, hurtful words, falsehood, etc., actions which encompass many other sins he will now be able to avoid.

At both the culmination of Elul on Erev Rosh HaShana and again at Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur, we annul any vows we have taken upon ourselves this past year, while declaring our intention to put effort towards avoiding vowing again. This is our hope going into the new year, that it will be one in which we will be cognizant of the power we have in our tongues and in our actions, thus leading us to act appropriately, setting us on path of Teshuvah.

Seperate but Equal

Sara Deichman ('19)

Within Ki Teitzei and Sefer Devarim as a whole, there is a high concentration of mitzvot dealing with separation. The first time divorce is mentioned in the Torah, the pesukim include discussion of a get, the required halachic document for a valid divorce.

The two letters, "gimel" and "tet," are never found next to each other anywhere else in the Torah. The word get itself implies separation, giving us the purpose of the document itself. Just as these two letters are not found juxtaposed anywhere else, are separate from one another and are therefore distinct from all other words in the Torah, the document too allows people to separate.

Another example of the importance of separation is in the mitzvah dealing with a donkey and an ox. There is a prohibition relating to, "do not plow together with an ox and a donkey" (22:10).

Although the need to separate these two animals may seem pointless, the Da'at Zekenim offers a compelling answer which is applicable to our daily lives. The ox is an animal who chews its cud, but a donkey is not. Therefore, had a donkey and an ox been walking together, even if they had been fed at the same time, the donkey would see the ox chewing, causing him to question if he missed his feeding or was given less food than the ox. Therefore, in order prevent jealousy, the animals are prohibited from walking together. If the Torah is able to recognize even the feelings of an animal, humans should try that much more to be courteous towards the feelings of others and practice humility.

These two instances of separation show how intricate the commandments of the Torah truly are. May we all recognize the little things, in the Torah and in life, and make our best efforts to practice the commandments dutifully.

From Drash to Pshat

Aliyah 1: The Torah tells us the laws of a captured woman. In the way the laws are set up, the Torah strongly hints that keeping a captured woman is an option, but it may not be recommended. A rebellious son, a glutton and a guzzler, must be stoned.

Aliyah 2: A man who was been stoned shall hang in public, but not overnight, for this is an insult to God. We are given the mitzvah of hashavat aveidah, returning lost property. The prohibition of crossdressing also appears in this aliyah, as well as Shiluach Hakan (sending away the mother bird)

Aliyah 3: Ma'akeh (building a fence on your roof) appears in this aliyah. Separate your seeds, separate your animals, separate your fibers. Laws pertaining to marriage and adultery.

Aliyah 4: Do not hate Edom or Mitzrayim. Several laws of cleanliness pertaining to the war camp. If an escaped slave flees to Israel, we must give him refuge. No promiscuity! You can only charge interest to non-jews. Keep your vows, or don't vow at all.

Aliyah 5: The right of field workers to eat from the produce they are harvesting. The Torah then briefly discusses marriage and the divorce document, a Get. A divorced couple cannot remarry if the woman has been remarried to another man (and divorced again or widowed) in the interim.

Aliyah 6: Newly married men may not go to war. No kidnapping and enslaving people. Don't forcibly take debts from people. We are commanded to always remember that Miriam was afflicted with tzara'at for speaking badly about Moses.

Aliyah 7: Pay your workers fairly and on time. Sins of sons do not transfer unto fathers, and vice versa. Leave some produce for the poor. You may not add to punishments, especially lashes. Yibum appears in this aliyah. Be honest with your money and measurements. Remembering Amalek.

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