

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Miriam Bas Eliezar.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS KI SEITZEI

Being True to One's Nature

You shall not see the ox of your brother or his lamb go astray, and hide yourself from them, you shall surely return them to your brother...so you shall do for any lost article of your brother that you have found, you cannot hide yourself. You shall not see the donkey of your brother or his ox falling on the road whilst you hide from them, you shall surely raise it with him (22:1, 3, 4).

In this week's *parsha*, we find laws relating to the obligation of returning lost objects and helping fellow Jews with animals that are struggling under a heavy burden. Clearly, the Torah is teaching us how much care and concern we must have, not only for our fellow Jews, but for their property as well.

Yet the Torah communicates these laws to us in an unusual manner; in both the case of returning a lost object and helping a struggling animal, the Torah states that you shall not hide from this obligation. Rashi (22:1) explains that hiding refers to "concealing the eye, as if he doesn't see it." This means that there is a prohibition against ignoring your friends lost object or the fact that his animal is struggling under a heavy burden.

Yet the Torah uses an odd way to teach us this prohibition: Instead of focusing on the requirement of the situation, the Torah focuses on one's act of pretending he doesn't see the situation. Surely, the Torah could have simply said, "you cannot ignore the needs of your friend." Why does the Torah teach us this prohibition in such a poetic manner as "you cannot hide yourself"?

The Gemara (*Yevamos* 79a) quotes Dovid Hamelech as saying that the Jewish people have three distinguishing

character traits: They are 1) compassionate 2) bashful and 3) do acts of kindness. In fact, Rava says, that anyone who has those three identifying marks, you will know is from the children of Avraham Avinu. In other words, these character traits are part of the spiritual DNA of the Jewish people.

We have such an instinct for *chessed* that the only way we could ignore the plight of our fellow Jew is by pretending not to see it. For this reason, the Torah phrases the prohibition as "you shall not hide." The Torah is telling us that we must be true to ourselves, and not construct a false sense of reality, though it may be more convenient.

This message is relevant in all aspects of our lives, whether it be professional or personal, and particularly as we enter a period of self-reflection in preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

After all, the first step in effecting positive change within ourselves is to identify behaviors that need improvement. Here, the Torah is teaching us that we must stop deluding ourselves ("you shall not hide") in order to justify what we want to do (ignoring someone else's misfortune). Only when we are honest with ourselves can we truly have an honest relationship with the Almighty.



Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha*, we are given the prohibition of *shaatnez*, the forbidden mixture of wool and linen. The Torah also provides us some more details here than the first time it is mentioned in *Parshas Kedoshim* (19:19). The following are some interesting facts that you might not have known:

1. This *mitzvah* is a *חוק*, a category of *mitzvos* that are not easily understood with human logic or sensibility, and one that we may never fully understand. However, Chazal, of course, always desiring to know and interpret Hashem's will, offer several explanations for as to why we are prohibited from wearing *shaatnez*. According to some, the ability to wear *shaatnez* was reserved specifically for the *kohanim* (*Daas Zekeinim* and *Chizkuni* in *Devarim* 22:11).
2. Rambam, in a contrary opinion, states that the reason it's prohibited is because gentile priests wore *shaatnez*, and we are forbidden from resembling them (*Moreh Nivukhim* 3:37).
3. Another explanation is that sheep were the sacrifice of Hevel while linen was the sacrifice of Kayin, and Hashem did not want them joined together (*Pirkey D'Rabbi Eliezer* 21).

Family Interest

You shall not lend upon interest to your brother...to a stranger you may lend upon interest; but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest (23:20-21).

This week's *parsha* contains the prohibition of lending money with interest to another Jew. It is prohibited to charge interest or pay interest to another Jew. Yet at the same time, the Torah makes it very clear that it is permissible to lend money to non-Jews and charge them interest. In fact, Maimonides (*Yad - Malveh Veloveh* 5:1) rules that it is a positive commandment to charge non-Jews interest. This dichotomy in lending practices has often been used as a pretext to attack Jews all over the world during the last two millennia.

In truth, the laws against charging interest and paying interest require a deeper understanding. As an example: Reuven needs money to pay for his daughter's wedding, and he happens to know that his friend Shimon has a lot of money sitting in the bank earning 2% interest. Reuven wants to borrow some of that money but he feels very uncomfortable asking Shimon, especially knowing that Shimon would be losing

that two percent interest that the bank is paying him. Reuven also realizes that he is already asking for a big favor because he knows that Shimon is taking a bigger risk by withdrawing it from the bank and lending it to him. Moreover, by Shimon lending Reuven the money and thereby losing his two percent earned interest, Reuven now feels like a charity case.

In reality, Reuven would MUCH prefer to pay interest so that he isn't uncomfortable asking Shimon for the loan and isn't made to feel like he is receiving charity; so why should Reuven not be allowed to pay interest?

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us that paying interest between two Jews isn't appropriate. Why not?

Let's say that a person's mother needed money; would a healthy person charge their own mother interest? Or their son, or a brother? Of course not. Functional families are devoted to each other even at a cost. Moreover, a son asking his parents for a loan doesn't feel like he is

receiving charity by not paying interest. The Torah is teaching us that the reason you aren't allowed to charge interest isn't because one should take advantage of another; the reason is because one Jew is obligated to treat another as family. This is why the Torah characterizes the borrower as family (23:20-21), "You shall not lend upon interest to your brother; [...] to a stranger you may lend upon interest; but to your brother you shall not lend upon interest."

This also explains why it is not only okay to charge non-Jews interest but actually a *mitzvah* to do so. We need to internalize that they aren't our family. Obviously, we shouldn't charge exorbitant interest, just something reasonable that they are happy to accept. Non-Jews understand that they aren't family and they, in fact, are more comfortable asking for a loan and paying interest because otherwise it would be like receiving charity.

4. One last opinion, offered by the Rosh, is that the פרוכת (the dividing curtain between the Kodesh and Kodesh Hakidoshim) was made out of *shaatnez*, and Hashem doesn't want people to "resemble" him, as it were, in the sense that the Shechina resides partly in the Kodesh Hakidoshim.

5. Interestingly, while sheep's wool is forbidden, wool made from camels or goats may be joined with linen (*Me'em Lo'ez Kedoshim* 19:19).

6. There is no prohibition if the fabrics are not sewn together, so one may wear a wool garment over a linen one. Similarly, *shaatnez* may also be used in fabric that is not worn, such as a tent. Additionally, the prohibition doesn't only apply to

entire garments. Even if these two materials are connected by just two threads, it's considered *shaatnez* and prohibited (*Me'em Lo'ez Kedoshim* 19:19).

7. שוע טווי נז, is an abbreviation of שוע טווי נז, which means "combed, spun, or woven" – the ways that it's forbidden to combine wool and linen (*Niddah* 61b).

8. Covers and towels are also forbidden from containing *shaatnez*, as one derives warmth and benefit from them (*Me'em Lo'ez Kedoshim* 19:19).

9. When a person wears *shaatnez* his prayers are not accepted, as the holy angels see that he resembles a gentile priest (according to that opinion) and cast his prayers aside. Not only that, but

the person gives strength to the Satan, who punishes him directly (*Me'em Lo'ez Kedoshim* 19:19). This is because שועטנז can be made into the letters שטן עז, meaning "Satan is strong" (*Mishna Brurah* 36:15, and the Be'er Heitev brings it from the *Sefer Igeres Hatiyul* by the Maharal's brother).

10. There's a question as to if the Kohanim would have been obligated in *tzitzis* while they did *Avodah* (this is only hypothetically, as they didn't wear four cornered garments). This is because we know from the Gemara (*Arachin* 3b) that if someone was exempt from *shaatnez* they were exempt from *tzitzis*, and the Kohanim wore *shaatnez* during *Avodah* (their *avnet* – belt was made from *shaatnez*).



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